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THE GOLDEN AGES OF HISTORY

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THE GOLDEN AGES OF HISTORY

BY

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PREFACE

THE catastrophe which oppresses the mind of the race in our time leads many of us once more to make ironic reflections upon the nature of progress. Is it, after all, an illusion? Nearly two hundred years ago the French philosophers, who did so much to emancipate man's courage as well as his intellect, discovered that there lies before the race an era of unlimited "perfectibility," as they called progress. For the first time in history men learned that neither supernatural curse nor natural law restricted their power to improve themselves and their social forms; and the discovery a century later of the truth of evolution set a seal upon the new charter of our rights.

But the larger knowledge of history which we acquired in the course of the nineteenth century led many writers to oppose this view. The path of humanity is, they say, like that of a planet circling round a sun, giving us an eternal alternation of summers and winters, not a straight and ascending course through time. Progress is cyclic. The race passes from vitality to decay and then, slowly and laboriously, back to vitality. Every long-lived empire has had a succession of Golden Ages and Dark Ages; and time and again some portion of the human family—the Assyrians, the Chaldaeans, the Phœnicians, the Greeks, and the Romans—has created a superb polity which in a few centuries crumbled into dust.

This is a hasty and superficial estimate of the story of the

race, and, in any case, we entered upon the twentieth century with such promise of peace and such consciousness of power that we thrust aside this melancholy theory of progress and returned to the inspiring philosophy of Diderot and D'Alembert. There would be no more Dark Ages. Our trail had crossed the foothills, with their disheartening rise and fall, and before us were the shining peaks of some vaguely wonderful civilization. Now . . . Whatever may be the issue of the present conflict, we are skirting the edge of the pit. We sank swiftly from the highest and, apparently, the most secure height which the race had yet reached, and in less than a quarter of a century from the optimistic years we found ourselves confronting the spectre of a Dark Age with all its barbaric features made still more horrid by the very science which had lifted us so high.

Singularly, no historian has made a scientific study of the creative forces which raised nations to the peak of their civilization and the destructive forces which brought them down. Naturally each expert historian speculates upon the vicissitudes of the particular nation of his choice. One inquires why the ancient civilization of Egypt passed, after three millennia of Golden Ages and Dark Ages, into a chronic and pathetic sterility. Another makes the same inquiry in the case of China, India, or Persia, or tries to explain to us why Rome or Athens rose to such magnificence and fell to such depths. But no modern historian has attempted to assign the common factors, or to ascertain if there were common factors, in the elevation and the downfall of all these higher forms of civilization.

We have in the geological record a broad analogy to these changes. Time after time parts of the earth's crust

have risen in the gigantic ridges and puckers which we call mountain-chains, and in the course of further millions of years the grinding forces of Nature have worn them down, as they are wearing down our Alps and Himalayas to-day.

But the scientific man is not content simply to describe these movements. He gives us a fairly satisfactory account of the forces which raised the crust to the altitude of mountain-peaks and a quite adequate knowledge of the agencies which levelled it once more. The historian declines to make a similar inquiry into the creative forces of the Golden Ages of history and the reasons why their glittering achievements fell into a drab decay, and man, like Sisyphus, had to begin his work afresh from the depths. It is far more important to us to discover, if we can, the secret of the acceleration of human progress at certain times and the decline that invariably followed; yet we do no more than make superficial guesses or arbitrary and prejudiced assumptions.

Or is it because these guesses and assumptions hold the field that the historian so respectfully refrains from entering it? Most familiar of them is the theory that the chief factor in the elevation of a race was always moral and religious earnestness, and that the most conspicuous demoralizing element was the decay of this fervour or the change from religious belief to scepticism and libertinism. This theory was firmly established in our literature in the days when writers, with the imperfect knowledge of historical facts which was then inevitable, used to compile what was elegantly called a philosophy of history.

But the expert who to-day explains to us why the country in which he is particularly interested—Egypt or India, China or Persia, Greece or Rome—rose to a higher

level of civilization than its neighbours never says this. He does not even include the state of religion or morals among the causes of rise or fall. He talks to us about special geographical conditions, contact with other races, or a prolonged freedom from warfare. He, in fact, very commonly finds that these "bloom-periods," as German writers prettily call them, of a civilization were times of an increased licence of conduct and a spread of scepticism in the class on which the rapid progress chiefly depended. Still more significantly, he never gives the title of Golden Age to a period of deep religious belief and ascetic feeling. In the case of England he chooses the Elizabethan Age, not the age of cathedral-building or the age of the Lollards or the Puritans. In the far-flung and often superb Arab-Persian civilization of the Middle Ages the historian invariably finds the more brilliant periods very sceptical and the sternly religious periods grey and undistinguished, if not destructive.

This will appear in the study of the fifteen Golden Ages which I set out to describe and analyse. These are the periods which the experts on each civilization commonly agree to regard as their finest phases. I, in fact, do not agree that some of them deserve the title. For what is the gold which the historian sees shining in them? Since historians are, or used to be, literary men, they are too apt to judge an age by the artistic quality of its literature. Many say, for instance, that the reign of Augustus was Rome's Golden Age, and to the reign of Hadrian, which was far superior to it in most respects, they give the paler title of the Silver Age. Some take the entire art of a period as a criterion, ignoring the fact that the accumulation of wealth, of which the art is the outcome and the

symbol, may, as in the early Roman Empire, be wet with the sweat and blood of tens of millions of slaves, or may, as in the Middle Ages, be due to the literal exploitation of four-fifths of the nation by a privileged one-fifth, or may represent tribute wrung from harshly treated subject-nations. They forget also that the most princely art may, as in Renaissance Italy, be accompanied by a grave debasement of character and a revolting practice of cruelty.

However, if we insisted upon testing our Golden Ages by all our modern criteria of civilization, we should perhaps conclude that there have not yet been any Golden Ages in history. Let us say, then, that we select the periods which the majority of the experts on each civilization deem the most brilliant and most progressive, and we search for the forces which caused the advance and those which checked and ruined it; and we will particularly inquire into the condition of religious belief and moral character in each such period. It is surely the most important function of history to teach us, by the analysis of facts, what are our genuine means of lifting life to a higher level and what are the principal reasons why the splendid achievements of one century have been submerged in the barbarism of the next.

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CHAPTER I

EGYPT'S GOLDEN AGE

THE Golden Age of Egyptian civilization, the first period in history to which that title is awarded, was the long reign of Amenhotep III in the fifteenth century before Christ. During the preceding 2,000 years the merry, brown-skinned folk who tilled their fields by the river had made little progress, for the advance of one age had been lost in the decay of the next. The austere and despotic kings who had compelled them to build those barbaric regalia of their vanity, the Pyramids, had passed away, and for two and a half centuries the land had then been darkened by distress and confusion.

A new line of kings, who ruled from Thebes, had in the end restored order and a fair measure of prosperity. This had lasted five centuries, but in a period of decline robust and better-armed invaders from Syria had seized the valley and afflicted the people. At last the princes of Thebes had rallied their forces and swept out the invader. Borne on by the wave of national enthusiasm, and now equipped with the weapons of their conquerors—the horse-chariot and the stout bronze spear—they had won for Egypt an empire and such wealth as the world had never before known.

With foreign conquest and trade had come cosmopolitanism, which is one of the richest inspirations of progress. "Father Nile" had been the progenitor of Egypt in a sense which the Egyptians knew not. Every early civilization had been born and cradled on the banks of a great river. It was in the valley of the Nile, in Mesopotamia, and on the banks of the Indus that

men had first risen from barbarism. For the chief cause of the advance of life was not now, as it had been in pre-human days, the savagery of conflict, which consumes the very qualities which it creates, but the free and friendly exchange of ideas by bodies of men who differ from each other in their ways or outlook.

In those days of primitive transport the river was the easiest route for this intercommunication of social groups, and no river was better fitted for the purpose than that which, in Egypt, still threaded the broad furrow or valley it had cut out of the African desert ages before, and had carpeted with fertile soil. When men learned to grow their food it had attracted tribes from all parts of the region. In the diversity of their animal-headed gods they still show from what different environments they had come: from places where the hawk or the lion, the cow or the hippopotamus, had seemed the chief embodiment of a supernatural force. The open river and the narrowness of the green fringes it had created between the rocky desert-walls had led to a social intercourse which had softened their tribal antagonisms and prepared them for the unity of the kingdom of Egypt.

But once this unity and a common culture had been imposed upon the entire population the stimulus to advance almost ceased. The simple and austere dignity of the monuments of older Egypt is misleading. What it chiefly means is that the monarchs and their priests had to maintain a fable that the King was the immortal son of a god, to be worshipped unseen behind the walls of palaces and temples. The people, who were as merry and bubbling with song and laughter as any on earth, had not in the least the solemn and sombre outlook which is sometimes attributed to them. But they lived in a peculiarly narrow world, and knew nothing of any social order different from their own. In a sense they

saw every day, when they grew their barley or tended their cattle and geese in the fields, the boundaries of the universe : the grim rock-walls which confined the valley, beyond which was only a sandy and sterile desolation. They did not know, as the priests and a few others knew, that across the sea, in Crete, and beyond the desert there were other kings and peoples with very different laws and customs. So they plodded cheerfully in the worn rut, dreaming only, in periods of distress, that they would some day regain the happier time of which tradition told.

The expulsion of the Semites ("Shepherd Kings") who had invaded them broke these confining bonds of the Egyptian mind and led to the stimulating developments which culminated in a Golden Age. Symbols of the life they had led for more than 3,000 years were the ass which jogged along the narrow earth-roads and the boat of acacia-wood on the river. Now horses drawing light chariots dashed along broader and better roads, bronze generally replaced copper, and iron was coming into use. When, with these advantages, they had chased the enemy to his home in Syria, they had found there cedar and other fine timber with which they could build large ocean-going vessels. In these they had sailed down the coast of Africa and had brought back wonderful cargoes of gold and spices, ivory and ebony and ostrich-feathers, and tales of strange lands and peoples. They spread south over Nubia, and in the north they shattered the confederation of their enemies in a battle at Har-Megiddo (Armageddon) which still lingers on the lips of men. In short, the rule of Amenhotep III stretched from Nubia to the Euphrates, and every province was skilfully organized, temperately governed, and made richly productive. Men in the cities of Mesopotamia and Asia Minor and in the opulent palaces of the princes of Crete now spoke with respect of Egypt.

Such gold and trade came to Thebes that it burst its ancient shell and grew to be a city nine miles in circumference. Round its fringe were the spacious mansions of the nobles, with cool, tree-shaded avenues, lakes, flower-gardens, and houses of fifty or sixty rooms and halls, with brightly and elegantly painted walls, beautiful inlaid furniture, and a profusion of lovely vases and carvings in bronze, ivory, and ebony. Beyond these, along the river, were the immense temples, linked by avenues of sphinxes, which the great King began to build. The ruined temples which men go thousands of miles to see in Luxor and Karnak to-day have not the chaste beauty of line which the Greeks would later teach the world to appreciate, but if with the mind's eye we see them as they were 3,500 years ago, brilliantly coloured, gleaming, with the contrast of black shadows, in the light of the sun of Egypt, animated by the picturesque processions of the crowds of priests and the rich pageantry of their services, we understand with what awe the contemporary world regarded them. Across the river were groves of trees and other superb temples, guarding the tombs of the kings who slept under the rock-wall of the valley.

Never before in history had a city shone with such wealth, and this gold and the new material for their work inspired the vision and improved the skill of artists and craftsmen, so that they wrought exquisite things in gold and bronze, ebony and ivory, glass and pottery, toys and furniture and wall-paintings. They had not, we recognize, the Greek genius for creating grandeur in simplicity, but they made a great artistic advance in the direction of realism, flouting the stiff conventional standards of art.

A bracing wind from the north had reached Thebes. The Aryans, who were yet to learn civilization from the races which many of them now stupidly affect to despise,

were beginning to emerge from barbarism and to spread southward. Their advance wave, the Mitanni—a people related to the common ancestors of the Persians and Hindus—had settled to the north of Syria, and Thotmes IV, father of Amenhotep III, had married a Mitanni princess. The son in turn had taken two Mitanni princesses into his harem.

What effect this had upon religious belief we shall see presently, but it must have contributed to the broadening of the Egyptian mind which occurred at this time. To attribute such an influence to them may seem strange to those who imagine that we moderns were the first to emancipate woman, but the truth is that she had as much freedom and equality in this Egypt of 3,500 years ago as she has in England to-day. Thotmes III, who was so able and energetic that he is sometimes called the Napoleon of that age, had been compelled to leave the rule of Egypt in the hands of his wife until she died. A woman of extraordinary vigour and intelligence—it was she who sent large vessels as far as what we now call Somaliland—she governed Egypt for twenty years and kept her equally virile husband chafing in idleness. Almost equally powerful was Amenhotep III's wife, Queen Ti; and that monarch had shown his disdain of the old conservatism—the priests had fabricated a legend that the queen was so sacred that it was the chief god who had impersonated her husband whenever she conceived—by choosing a bride, presumably a beautiful girl, from an obscure family amongst his subjects.

Some writers go so far as to speak of a democratization of Egyptian life and institutions at this stage, and, although that is an inadmissible expression, there was certainly a wide departure from old traditions, and Amenhotep III bravely encouraged it. He disdained to secure the homage of his people by remaining screened from the common gaze in the recesses of a palace. He

went among them and gave them prosperity and splendour; and he succeeded so well that in the thirty-six years of his reign he had only once to mount his war-chariot and crush a small revolt. Four decades of peace and a vast income derived from a well-ordered and, for the age, justly ruled kingdom were the foundations of this Golden Age.

There was a general improvement of conditions. Sons of the middle class, carefully trained in schools, had more opportunity to rise to high office in the army and the temples. Peasants were protected from tyrannical nobles, and large numbers of them got emancipation from serfdom and were allowed to own land. Religious ceremonies and pageants were made the occasions of public holidays. Hundreds of thousands of the people flocked to the festival cities and drew out the day with song and dance and barley-wine, and a careless freedom of conduct.

We thus not only clearly see that the causes of this notable advance of Egyptian civilization were secular, but we learn that the sway of the priests at this time was greatly weakened; that it was, in fact, not a decay of religion which led to the ruin of the happy kingdom, but precisely an attempt to reform or spiritualize religion. Some writers, it is true, claim as an inspiring development of the time that the belief in personal immortality, which had hitherto been declared the prerogative of the King, and possibly of the nobles, now spread to all the people. When this really occurred is disputed, but we should gain nothing by placing it in the reign of Amenhotep III, because we find no change whatever in the very free and frivolous conduct of the people.

Indeed, as Prof. Breasted reminds us, it does not matter at what period the priests taught the common people that they also were immortal and would after death be judged by the stern Osiris, because they deprived

their teaching of ethical influence. They invented a fantastic theory of the journey of the dead man's soul to the judgment-hall. It was beset with demons and weird perils, but the priests sold all sorts of charms and incantations which would, if a man bought them while he lived, give him a sort of insurance-policy against the dangers which his loose conduct would otherwise bring upon him.

These arguments do not concern our inquiry, for, though we will examine later the behaviour of the people and find it very far from evidencing a pious belief in immortality, it has nothing to do with the causes which either create or destroy a Golden Age. The moralist who bemuses us with his reflections upon the rise and fall of nations is not only usually wrong about the historical facts, but he forgets that all that is relevant to the matter is the religious belief or conduct of the small body of men in a community who are responsible, in so far as there is any human responsibility, for the rise and fall. The mass of the people profit or suffer by such changes, but, however we may estimate their influence in a modern democracy, they did not in ancient Egypt have any share in those changes of policy, trade, or government which raised the national life to a higher level or depressed it. The workers created the wealth, but how much wealth they should create, and whether it should be used to ruin the country by aggressive war and princely extravagance, or to adorn it with art and culture and glorious monuments and public works which all might enjoy, did not, in these Golden Ages, depend upon them.

And when we inquire about the attitude to religion of the ruling minority in the time of Amenhotep III we learn that it was distinguished by a liberality which at once raises a suspicion of scepticism. "A god more or less made no difference to Amenhotep III," says so careful an authority as Sir E. A. Wallis Budge. The religious

development at this period was discussed even in our daily papers a few years ago, after the discovery of the tomb of Tutankhamen, but there was one defect in the lavish education of the public. Instead of speaking of the son of Amenhotep III as "the Heretic King," our journalists and literary men ought, as Prof. Breasted observes, to have spoken of "Heretic Kings"; for the father was merely more politic in his heresy than his luckless son. When we appreciate this the relation of religion to that splendid phase of Egyptian civilization is clearer.

The chief god of Thebes, Amen, had been originally one of the many crude local phallic deities and had, as was usual, grown in stature and respectability with his worshippers. When Thebes became the capital of Egypt and its kings "lords of the world," Amen was found to be another manifestation or aspect of the great official god of the country, Ra, the ruler of the petty universe which was known to the early Egyptians; for the claim that these priests had some profound wisdom and knowledge of astronomy is nonsense. With imperial expansion, however, the universe had opened out astonishingly, and Amen was too small and too abstract, in the new form which the priests had given him, for the strong, practical men of the new age. So when the Mitanni princesses and their servants came with tales about the vigorous gods of their people—Mithra and Varuna and Indra, the gods of the blazing sun and the roaring tempest, the gods of the Vedic chants—many were attracted. Ra, the sun-god, was still the chief deity at the priestly colleges of Heliopolis ("The City of the Sun") in the north, and his kinship to Mithra and Varuna was recognized. It seems that in one of these priestly schools the solar theology took the special form of a cult of the sun's fiery disk, the Aten.

There is evidence that Thotmes IV had not been the

legitimate heir to the throne, and that these priests of Heliopolis had helped him to secure it, in opposition to the priests of Thebes, and had educated his son Amenhotep III. However that may be, rebellion against the Amen cult at Thebes began in the short reign of Thotmes, but his son was too sound a statesman to encourage it. He conciliated the priests by taking the name by which we know him, which means "Devoted to Amen," and building a superb temple to their god. But he also adopted names (Ra-hotep, Tem-hotep, etc.) which rendered the same homage to other gods. "To him," says Budge, "all the gods of Egypt were alike . . . he was as willing to worship himself and to sacrifice to himself as to Amen."

It is clear that his wife, Queen Ti, whom he consulted on all matters of importance, embraced, and taught her son to cherish, the cult of Aten. Amenhotep built for her a magnificent house to the west of Thebes, with so large an estate that it included a lake a mile and a half long. On this lake she, and doubtless he, sailed in a beautifully painted barge which bore the name "Aten Sparkles"—to translate it into English; and, since her son Amenhotep IV disdained and abolished all the priestly fuss about the dead and the cult of Osiris, it looks as if they were sceptical about the belief in immortality, instead of that belief becoming a power in the life of Egypt.

The man of high intelligence who serves three or more gods either believes in none or regards them all as partial representations of one greater god, as cultured Romans did in the days of the Empire. For our present purpose it does not matter. It is enough that religion was clearly not a vital element in the mind of the monarch of Egypt's Golden Age. And his courtiers followed the royal example. We have the funerary inscription of two of the King's chief ministers, and from this we learn that they paid

homage to a number of gods, including Aten. Prof. Peet, indeed, tells us that the literature and tomb-inscriptions of the time have, in comparison with those of earlier ages, little reference to religion.

In the middle class, as we may call the merchants, physicians, teachers, and officials—we are told that there were no lawyers, a man pleading his own case in court with full confidence in its justice—there was a good deal of scepticism. Our general literature still offers us as a proof of the solemn piety of the Egyptians the statement of the Greek historian Herodotus that even in their most festive banquets they brought a mummy into the room to remind them of death. Herodotus made many blunders owing to his ignorance of the language, but what he does say at this point has not at all the meaning which literary men suppose. It was not a mummy, but a painted wooden model of one, which the Greek saw taken round the room at gay Egyptian dinners; and he tells us that what was said to the guests was: "Gaze upon this while you drink, and enjoy yourself, for when you are dead you will be even as this is."

That this was just a sceptical and rather irreverent sauce to the feast we now know definitely, because we have found in the tombs copies of the song which a harper sang to the guests at these dinners. This "Song of the Harper" may correctly be summarized in the familiar words: "Let us eat and drink and be merry, for to-morrow we die." It reminds the guests of those who have gone from the earth and then, obviously with reference to the popular belief that they are happy in the gardens of Osiris, it emphatically and repeatedly says that no one knows anything about what lies beyond the grave, so

Encourage thy heart to forget it,
And let thy heart dwell upon that which is profitable
to thee.

Not death, but life, is the burden of the song. To borrow a few further lines from the translation which Prof. Breasted gives in his *History of Egypt* :—

Follow thy desire while thou livest,
Lay myrrh upon thy head,
Clothe thee in fine linen,
Imbued with luxurious perfumes.
The genuine things of the gods.
Increase yet more thy delights.
Let not thy heart be weary,
Follow thy desire and thy pleasure,
And mould thine affairs on earth
After the mandates of thy heart
Till that day of lamentation cometh to thee,
When the stilled heart hears not the mourning.
For lamentation recalls no man from the dead.

Prof. W. Max Müller, who gives us in his *Liebespoesie der alten Ägypten* the best study of the song and of Egyptian morals at this period, says that the priests repeatedly suppressed it on account of its “atheistic joy in life,” but it was popular for centuries, as it certainly was in the Golden Age.

The truth is that, as we have known for years, these Egyptian banquets which popular literature, with its “mummy at the feast,” still represents as closing with a long-faced contemplation of death, were quite lucullan in their opulence and gaiety. The guests were garlanded with flowers, the lamps burned perfumed oil, the wine was served in elegant vessels of gold or silver, and nude Syrian dancing-girls provided entertainment. The professional harper, who sang the defiant death-chant, was himself a heavy drinker, and on the days of religious festivals he entertained crowds with love-songs in the forecourts of the temples. But his chief profit came from the middle class, which became very rich. We read of an

official who, probably on New Year's Day, made a present to Amenhotep II—so that this was long before the wealth of Egypt reached its height—which included several chariots inlaid with gold and silver, thirty ebony clubs decorated with the same precious metals, and many hundred ivory and ebony statues, ivory whip-handles, and bronze swords and daggers.

We get a different impression of the middle class from short and sober moral treatises by laymen, the Maeterlincks of the time, of which we find copies in the tombs. In their freedom from either mysticism or asceticism they are akin to the moral literature of ancient China, though they sometimes have the note of genial septuagenarian scepticism which amuses us in *Ecclesiastes*. They ignore the gods of Egypt and, if they refer at all to religion, speak only of "God." Some are openly sceptical. "If I knew where God is," says one, "I would certainly make an offering to him." Prof. Peet says that these guides to conduct and a large number of the tomb-inscriptions of the time suggest that the nobles and the men of the middle class "did not walk in the path of virtue, except in so far as the practical requirements of life persuaded them." It brings these men of 3,500 years ago remarkably close to ourselves. Clearly there were as many types of character then as there now are, from the puritan to the selfish sensualist, but the general attitude was to disdain the popular cults and distil a code of behaviour from actual experience of life.

The mass of the people, we saw, neither make nor destroy a civilization, but some attach importance to their behaviour, and we may consider what the experts say about it. According to Prof. Erman, who makes a special study of it in his *Life in Ancient Egypt*, it was at a very low level; but he is speaking, as moralists do, almost entirely about sexual conduct. We have no evidence that the Egyptians of the working class were less honest,

truthful, and kindly than the people of other nations. They were, Greek writers of a later date assure us, the cleanest and healthiest people in the world; and we know that they formed what we may call the earliest trade-unions. All the men on a large barge or in a workshop, for instance, formed a union, with a banner of their own, and their leader kept a record of the character of each, his failures to report for work, his excuses, and so on.

But, since it is chiefly to a laxity in sexual relations that the moralist traces the decay of nations, we may admit that all the evidence suggests considerable looseness. When it is surmised that the belief in Osiris as judge of the dead ought to have restrained them, we recall, not merely their "insurance" against the perils of the next world, but the fact that the cult of Osiris itself was phallic and would encourage erotic sentiments. The image of the God which on certain festivals was carted from village to village, to the joy of the people, was the most unblushingly phallic statue of which I have ever read a description. Herodotus further tells us (II, 60) that he saw crowds of women on religious festivals insult each other with gestures which would not be tolerated in public to-day; and Athenæus says, in a fragment which is published in the Appendix to Müller's edition of Ctesias, that Egyptian women were in his time considered the most erotic of all women.

In law the adulterer should receive a thousand strokes of the lash, and rape was punished with death, but the former clause must have been a dead letter. Marriage was so lightly regarded by the mass of the people, and divorce so easy, that loose practice was inevitable. A youth, from the age of fourteen upward, just invited a girl, who might be no more than thirteen, to live with him. She seems quite commonly to have been his sister, for in the love-songs, which are as outspoken as those of the

early mediæval troubadours, the man generally addresses his beloved as "sister," which could hardly occur unless marriages of brothers and sisters were common. Divorce, like marriage, required no religious or legal sanction or ceremony. While this strengthened the position of the woman—later Greek writers disdainfully say that in Egypt a wife often supported a home while the husband did the domestic work—it would certainly encourage a free view of conjugal relations. The popular tales which circulated everywhere—the story of Potiphar's wife is one, slightly modified—reflect this looseness.

But let us not lose sight of one point. Whatever scepticism we may find in the nobles and the middle class, and whatever looseness we may admit in the life of the workers, had nothing to do with either the making or the ruin of this first Golden Age. Here there is no dispute. The tragedy of the collapse was due entirely to the King and his ministers. They grossly neglected the duty of maintaining the armed strength of Egypt and of watching for the occasions to employ it; and this was because they gave all their attention to, and used all their resources in, the establishment of a new and higher religion and a stricter code of life.

When Amenhotep III closed his long and beneficent career, his son and heir, Amenhotep IV, was a boy. For six years Queen Ti ruled for him, and she maintained the liberal and prudent policy of her late husband. But her own devotion to the new deity Aten allowed her son to pass more and more under the influence of his foreign wife, who was of Mesopotamian extraction, and of priests and devotees of Aten in the palace service. Courtiers found it profitable to change their theological allegiance, and a demoralizing feud spread in the city. When Ti died, the young King sealed the doom of the Golden Age by an act which has been praised as a flame of idealism in the darkness of the heathen world. He proclaimed

that Aten was the one god, and that all other cults must be suppressed.

There are Egyptologists who describe him as a man of great energy and ability; and there are medical experts who deduce from the examination of his mummy that he suffered from water on the brain. The impartial historian sees only that his policy ruined Egypt. The priesthoods had been extraordinarily rich and powerful, and they stirred the people against him. He fled from Thebes and spent vast sums in building a new city. Ikhnaten ("Devoted to Aten"), the new name he gave himself, symbolizes his folly. In his devotion to the new cult, all are agreed, he grossly neglected the interests of his country. Warnings from provincial governors that hostile tribes and armies were seizing their territory were unheeded. The decay was so rapid that his son-in-law, Tutankhamen, who later came to the throne and restored the old cults, could not save Egypt.

The theory of heredity which was generally adopted in science a few decades ago teaches that the "genes"—the microscopic particles which build up the body and are transmitted from generation to generation—are not affected by whatever happens to the body itself during life. I do not remember that a single man of science pointed out that this view completely discredited the theory that loose morals, as a result of the lapse of religion, led to what was called "the decay of a nation." In fact, however, we clearly see that religious morals in Egypt neither improved with the advance of the kingdom nor deteriorated before its fall.

Some then put forward the theory that possibly the germinal elements, the hereditary strain, deteriorated from some cause or other: possibly from inbreeding or the practice of marrying sisters. Let us get one point clear at the outset of this study. Nations or peoples do not decay. The people of Egypt are the same to-day as

they were 3,500 years ago; nor have we any evidence of physical or mental decay at that time in the middle class or even the nobles. The Golden Age ended—abruptly, *not* with the slowness of decay—because the blunders of the King and his ministers destroyed the State authority and its military strength, and in this way they destroyed the prosperity upon which all the fine culture had depended.

CHAPTER II

BABYLON UNDER THE CHALDÆANS

CIVILIZATION, in the sense in which science uses the word—that stage of mental development at which men begin to live in cities under advanced political forms and to have written language—was reached, we saw, about the same time in Egypt, Mesopotamia, and North-western India. We saw the reason for this, and science provides an answer if you ask why, out of all the broad earth, men rose from barbarism first in these contiguous regions; for the dawn of civilization in China came 2,000 years later. The reason is that until between 15,000 and 20,000 years ago the greater part of Europe and western Asia had been locked in the grip of an Ice Age which had lasted about 100,000 years, and the great desert which spread from the Atlantic to the Persian Gulf had barred the retreat of the swarming tribes of prehistoric men into Africa. Thus the stretch of comparatively warm and fertile low-lying land which extended from the shores of the broad lake that is now the eastern half of the Mediterranean to the south of Asia became the most thickly populated and most stimulating part of the earth.

On the same realistic lines we understand why Egyptian civilization rose to the height of a Golden Age a thousand years before Mesopotamia and thirteen centuries before India. The configuration of Egypt, a narrow valley with a desert barrier to east and west, the sea to the north, and only barbaric tribes to the south, first facilitated the welding of the numerous tribes and principalities into one wealthy kingdom, then protected it against foreign marauders. The situation was very different in

Mesopotamia. The time came when, as in Egypt, a line of powerful kings united the cities and provinces under their sceptre, but there were no natural barriers to protect them from the periodic overflow of the peoples which, all round them, outgrew their means of subsistence: the sinewy Arabs to the south, the robust pastoral folk of the hills to the north, the teeming populations of Syria and Asia Minor in the west. Hence destruction followed speedily upon construction.

For a time the Assyrians, exploiting to the full the new military potentialities—the horse and iron, which the barbarians had introduced—had created a powerful and notable civilization, the capital of which, Nineveh, was second only to the Thebes of Amenhotep III. But the very ruthlessness with which they had created an empire destroyed them; which is the safest moral lesson one can draw from history, yet in our own day we see it flouted for the hundredth time. In the first hour of weakness or fatigue the peoples whom the Assyrians had oppressed united against them and annihilated them.

Among these peoples were the Kaldi or Chaldaeans, who had won control of Babylon. The older empire of Babylonia, open on all sides to marauders, had decayed before it reached a Golden Age, but its merchants had not chafed under the iron rule of Assyria, for this made the routes over the entire region safe for their caravans. This profitable servitude did not suit the Kaldi. They had brought from Arabia all the virility and pugnacity of the Semites of the desert, and from lower Mesopotamia, where they settled, they plotted to seize Babylon and restore its old empire. Stung by the rebellions they inspired in the city, the Assyrian King Sennacherib had in the year 689 expelled all the inhabitants, burned all that could be burned, and diverted the waters of a large canal upon the brick temples and houses. His successors had begun to restore the great city when the Chaldaeans

and their allies smote Assyria itself into the dust (612 B.C.); and the Chaldaean general at once declared himself King of Babylon and took over the work of restoration.

The son of this “son of a nobody,” as the monuments call him, was Nebuchadrezzar, who is known even to our school-children as Nebuchadnezzar. It is another reminder how lamentably fables of a more ignorant age linger in our general literature and our school manuals. The overwhelming majority of our people think of Nebuchadrezzar as a gross and ignorant bully who ruled over a city of such licence of life that its name has been for nearly three millennia a by-word for corruption. Yet we have known for half a century that he was, on the contrary, a great and enlightened ruler, “the Napoleon of his age”; and that the new Babylon he constructed and governed was the greatest city in the world between Thebes and Athens, far more orderly than any city in Europe would be during a thousand years after the fall of Rome.

When Nineveh fell the Egyptians claimed that they inherited the Assyrian empire. They seized Judæa and, with a large mercenary army—the core of it a body of “brazen men” or bronze-armoured men whom we recognize as Greeks—they advanced as far as the Euphrates. But the young prince Nebuchadrezzar led his Chaldaean-Babylonian forces with such skill that he chased the invaders back to the frontier of Egypt, annexing Judæa—hence the later revolts and the Babylonian Captivity—as he passed. But he heard that his father had died and, fearing that the priests of Marduk might in his absence choose a king of pure Babylonian blood, he raced in a four-horse chariot from the frontier of Egypt to Babylon and secured the throne.

Let us see Babylon as the Jewish exiles—not as their later and bitterly prejudiced writers—saw it. Since the total population of Jerusalem at that time was only about 10,000 and the glory of Solomon’s Temple a myth, we can

imagine what kind of a town they left behind them on the rocks of Judæa. Very different was the land they entered on the fifth or sixth day of their melancholy journey across the desert. Before them opened a vast, skilfully irrigated, wonderfully fertile plain, through which the broad blue rivers flowed. It bore crops of such wheat and barley as the Jewish farmer had seen only in his dreams, rich emerald plots of sesame, and groves of stately palms on all sides. In the fields were the free and merry agricultural workers in dull red or blue tunics of coarse wool: the women, as in Egypt, equal to the men. On the broad roads were merchants or couriers hastening to the capital, their long and brightly coloured robes overlaid with beads or fringed shawls: perhaps at times a priest from some provincial temple with bronze horns (in honour of the moon-god) in his headdress and a gay ribbon knotted at the back of his neck. Mules and camels bore loads of food or merchandise to the capital.

From almost a day's march away they would see the outline of a city which would take away their breath, for its gleaming walls, of glazed brick decorated with coloured figures and topped by crenellated towers, rose 200 feet or more above the soil. Possibly the roof-gardens of some of the palaces showed a dark green fringe against the blue sky above the summit of the walls, and higher still towered the tips, on which were the golden houses of the gods, of the pyramid-shaped temples, clothed in glossy tiles of many colours which glittered in the semi-tropical sun.

Man had, as usual, taken the complexion of the earth on which he lived. There was no stone on the Babylonian plain, or the great mud-flats which the rivers had formed and Samerian science had converted into the most fruitful soil on earth. From the clay of these beds, shaped into sun-dried or burned bricks, the loftiest temples and most massive walls and palaces had been built, and they were

so solidly constructed that travellers walk like pygmies among the tumbling ruins of them to-day.

But the impression of ugly heaviness and raw monotony which this is apt to give us is quite wrong. Just as the abundance of stone encouraged sculpture and a columned architecture in Egypt and Greece, so the restriction of the Babylonian artist to clay—apart from the use of palm-wood, bronze, and mother-of-pearl in detail—forced him to exploit its æsthetic potentialities. Chief of these is the glazed and coloured brick-surface, and the gigantic city walls, the palaces, the temples, and the ten thousand mansions of the rich were faced with glazed tiles, blue or white, relieved by large coloured figures of bulls and dragons. To mitigate the glare in the city—though most of it consisted of the familiar narrow, sunless streets of an oriental town—the mansions of the nobles and merchants had beautiful gardens on a series of terraces rising from the ground and on the roof, and some sort of hydraulic machinery for supplying them with water from the river. These “Hanging Gardens of Babylon,” as they seemed to the visitor, counted as one of the Seven Wonders of the ancient world and must have been as conspicuous as they were lovely.

One of the gates into the city, the Ishtar Gate, is still well preserved, and in the complete model of it in the Berlin Museum we admire its combination of strength and elegance. The tunnel through the massive city wall is ninety feet in length, and it has a stupendous gate-house, flanked by towers which rose fifty feet above the walls, at each end. The Greek traveller and historian Herodotus says that the walls themselves were 300 feet high; though, as it is not clear that he visited Babylon, scholars here suspect an exaggeration. But the lower part of the gate rises even in its ruin to a height of forty feet and gives us an idea of its impressiveness. The entire mass was faced with tiles of a delicate and pleasing

shade of blue, and 575 large figures in relief of brown bulls and white dragons with yellow horns and manes were set in it, while the borders were relieved by coloured friezes in the same glazed pottery.

This was one—doubtless the most impressive—of the many gates which pierced the walls, and, although the height of the walls may be exaggerated in the text of Herodotus, the remains show that they were imposing structures. They are still forty feet high in some places and, since they are composed of two parallel walls each of which is twenty-five feet thick, with the space between them filled with clay and rubble, they are nearly ninety feet thick. The upper surface was a layer of bricks cemented with asphalt, and what was long regarded as a fable—the statement that two chariots might race abreast on top of the walls—seems to have been a fact. Herodotus is wrong also when he says that this mighty wall confined the city in a square which measured ten miles on each side. But the archaeologist traces this astounding shell of the great city to-day for at least twelve miles. We faintly imagine this vast enclosure rising perhaps 200 feet above the plain, with still loftier towers for the guard at intervals of 170 feet.

The buildings in the palace quarter and the temple quarter were on the same Cyclopean scale. The splendour of the royal palace, which is to-day an unsightly mass of brickwork, we cannot restore, but we can picture its outward grandeur, the well-watered terrace and roof gardens of palms and semi-tropical flowers moderating the brilliance of the glazed façade. The palaces of the nobles and richer merchants reflected the regal magnificence, and from the roofs one doubtless gazed over the ever-green and teeming plains. It was not the yellow, tattered Mesopotamia of to-day but the finely ordered, smiling Babylonia of long ago which gave rise to the legend of the Garden of Eden.

* A broad paved road led to the temple quarter on the far side of the city. Here the temple of the chief god—indeed, to his priests and the educated Babylonians the only god—Marduk, rose in ponderous majesty to a height of 300 feet. It was a more or less pyramid-shaped structure of solid brick. The lack of stone and large timber in the region easily led to this type of structure, but it also suited the requirements of Babylonian religion. The worship of the gods must be conducted by the sacred caste of priests in solemn privacy. The house of the god, a real golden house with statue—Herodotus makes it fifteen feet high—and furniture of solid gold encrusted with jewels, was perched on the summit, and none but the priests dare ascend the external staircases which led to it. Here they made offerings and recited prayers which might, with little alteration, be used in churches to-day; indeed, one New York clergyman, of broad views, has used them in his church.

For the people a spacious courtyard surrounded the base of the vast pile, and the almost perpetual sunshine facilitated their open-air devotions. Here you would have seen, 2,500 years ago, venerable priests reading lists of sins to the penitent, so that they might recognize by what sin they had brought the anger of the god upon themselves in the shape of sickness and loss and might receive a sort of absolution. Here visitors came from all parts of the world to gaze at the unique temple. We gather from recent excavations that its sides rose steeply to a great height, then narrowed in a series of terraces to the summit; and the whole, Greek travellers tell us, was coloured with glazed tiles, in seven broad belts, in honour of the seven conspicuous heavenly bodies or the deities associated with them. At the lowest stage a black band honoured Saturn—to give the gods the names by which they were recognized in Europe and incorporated, in Teutonic form, in our days of the week—and

above this were bands of orange (Jupiter), red (Mars), gold (the sun), yellow (Venus), blue (Mercury), and silver for the moon. It is thought by experts that the bands of gold and silver colour were thin plates of the precious metals.

We who are familiar with the Greek, the Gothic, and the Modern styles of architecture may reflect that these structures of ancient Babylon do not evince a very high stage of æsthetic development. We must, however, appreciate that, while the city was now certainly in a position to import a good deal of stone from Assyria or the northern hills, the artistic tradition of 2,000 years or more, fixed by the scarcity of stone, would have given the Babylonians a standard of their own; and the glossy splendour, tempered by the dark green of the ascending gardens, would seem to them a type of beauty in which they surpassed all other countries.

They were, in fact, essentially a merchant population, their economy based upon a rich agriculture rather than industry, and they, in spite of the poor means of transport, brought beautiful things from every part of the known world: graceful furniture, golden chairs or thrones studded with sapphires, rare glass, rich purple stuffs, gold and silver work, bronzes, and ivories. The patient caravans bore their loads from Syria, Phœnicia, and Egypt. Even the seals, in semi-precious stone, which dangled from the girdles of the merchants, were often exquisitely chiselled. Think of all this under the brilliant, cloudless sky and in the smokeless air of a Mesopotamia which differed from that of to-day as summer differs from winter, and you will begin to understand why Babylon made so deep an impression in history that, though its very ruins were lost to the memory of man for 1,000 years, thousands know its name to-day for one who ever heard of Thebes or Tyre or Persepolis.

Art is, moreover, only one of those characteristics of

a Golden Age which appear whenever a civilization attains such wealth as these colossal monuments prove Babylon to have reached. Although no expert historian will question that the age of Nebuchadrezzar was the most splendid and most advanced period in 3,000 years of Sumerian-Babylonian-Assyrian history, or of all the peoples who had for more than 2,000 years filled the populous region from Egypt to the Persian hills, from Asia Minor to India, some readers may be surprised to find it selected, in preference to certain others, as a Golden Age. They may prefer the age of Augustus at Rome; though they would have to close their eyes to the fact that its wealth, from which its culture flowered, was based upon a monstrous system of unprotected slavery. Others might prefer the age of the troubadours, the crusaders, and the builders of the Gothic cathedrals; but the serfs, who were then four-fifths of the nation, were treated as slaves had been in all but the worst periods of the Roman Empire, the general character was vile, and the knights and nobles treated men and women of every class below their own with the most arrogant brutality and injustice.

In Babylon, on the contrary, the wealth was created by the industry of free workers living under a system of remarkable social justice. We have a copy of the code of laws—the Hammurabi Code—under which Babylonia had been ruled fourteen centuries before the reign of Nebuchadrezzar. Since that monarch made it his pride to restore the culture and institutions of the older Babylonia, we may assume that the old code was still honoured; probably without such crude archaic clauses as that a man and woman taken in adultery should be bound together and thrown from one of the high towers on the wall into the river.

It was a code which protected the weak and poor as few codes of law have done until our own time. Forty

clauses ensured justice and equality in the relations of husbands and wives and gave woman as high and free a position as she had in Egypt. Forty further clauses prescribed the minimum wage of every class of worker, and even minutely stated the penalty for injuries that might be due to the fault of, for instance, surgeons or builders. Several clauses secured justice for slaves; though it is clear that Babylonian wealth was not in any measure that is worth noticing won by the labour of slaves.

Another distinction which gives Babylon a title to be enrolled in a short list of Golden Ages is that it contributed to the human tradition something that would not, like a glorious art or architecture, perish almost without trace, but was a beginning of what has chiefly made our civilization what it is—science. The claim, which mystics still repeat, that the priests of Egypt had a profound wisdom which has been lost is quite arbitrary. Greeks travelled in Egypt centuries before its literature perished and its culture decayed, and in their works and those of their Latin pupils we read the kind of knowledge which Egypt accumulated in 3,000 years: a vast and cloudy mythology and a very elementary acquaintance with astronomy, mathematics, chemistry, physiology, and medicine. In these branches of early science the Babylonians surpassed the Egyptians.

The restriction to clay which hampered the Babylonian artist may be held accountable also for the poor development of literature. No papyrus reeds, to give a smooth surface for the pen, grew in the rivers of Babylonia, and the use of parchment had not yet begun. One jabbed the characters on a slab or tile of clay and hardened it. Perhaps it is not fanciful to suggest that this explains why such documents as have survived are what we may call necessary documents: the prayer and ritual books of the priests, legal and commercial contracts, personal

letters, and a long semi-religious story, the *Epic of Gilgamesh*—telling of the Creation, the Garden and Fall, the Flood, etc.—which served as a sort of Bible. But if a brick is not an inspiring medium for writing, it is less perishable than papyrus, and some of the tablets and fragments which have been found in the ruins, especially of the large Assyrian libraries, indicate the height of Babylonian science.

In astronomy the priests, observing the heavens from the summits of the temples, had gone as far as observation with the naked eye and shrewd reflection could take them. The requirements of trade and land measurement had given rise to an elementary mathematics. In the more urgent field of physiology and medicine they had made greater progress. Until the age of archæological exploration began it had been generally believed, on the word of Greek travellers, that there were in Babylon only two ways of treating disease: either you sent the patient to the temple and let the priest discover by what sin he had caused the gods to allow the devils to afflict him, or you put the sufferer on the street, outside his house, until some man who had had the same disease came along and could advise. We now know, says the *Cambridge Ancient History* (III, 241), that the Babylonians had “a systematic practice in medicine, a very wide and close knowledge of disease, and a deep knowledge of drugs.” They had drugs, mineral and vegetable, for diseases of all parts of the body; and the study of these drugs in turn led to a very fair knowledge of chemistry and botany. It was no mean heritage that they passed on to the Greeks.

The Golden Age had risen from a field of ruin almost in a single generation, and we need make no deep study to discover the causes of the rapid and splendid efflorescence. It was not an act of creation. While Babylon had been sodden and deserted, its scattered citizens had preserved in a dozen other cities the great traditions of the race,

enriched by the better elements of Assyrian experience. The only magic was the genius of Nebuchadrezzar and his chief assistants. They restored the rich and far-flung trade of Babylon, and it at once flowered into art and culture.

Nor does the speedy collapse of the civilization present us with a problem. The superb city rising from the plain and its dazzling wealth aroused cupidity on every horizon, and the robust Medes and Persians on the hills watched until weaker men succeeded the great Nebuchadrezzar. The book of *Daniel* is, we have long known, a piece of very crude and much later fiction. The tablets which give us a fragmentary knowledge of the life of Babylon show no decay, but an enemy more powerful than Babylon had had reason to foresee gathered strength and, by bribery and treachery, won his way behind the formidable walls.

The kind of writer who is determined to connect the rise and fall of every civilization with moral-religious changes would have here to suggest that Nebuchadrezzar and the men who assisted him in the making of the Golden Age rose in piety and character above their predecessors. The suggestion would be superfluous, because the secular causes of the advance are clear enough, and it would be arbitrary, because we have not a tittle of evidence about their religious sentiments. The fact that the king raised a magnificent temple to Marduk and richly endowed his priests has no such significance. A man of foreign extraction, as the monarch was, would find such conduct politic. His father had usurped the throne. There is, in fact, evidence that scepticism—even Atheism—spread in Babylon as in Egypt. One often wonders why a Hebrew prophet on the hills of Judæa should repeatedly, in the Psalms, rebuke the man who “says in his heart that there is no God,” but the Higher Critics now assure us that these documents were written after

the Babylonian Captivity. In the Atheistic first part of Job, which is now traced to two writers who lived in Babylon—the Hebrews modified the book and added the pious termination—we have similar evidence.

But these reflections are idle. We see the social and cultural life of Babylon rise to a great height and decline while we find no trace of religious change. Of much greater interest, on account of the evil repute which ancient Babylon still bears in our literature, is the ethical issue: and, since we again have no evidence about the general moral character, and no reason whatever to suppose that the Babylonians were less just or honest than we are, the interest centres upon the question of sexual morals.

We have here another illustration of the falseness of those historical traditions which are still purveyed to the public in our general literature. The Egyptians were, the old legend runs, deeply religious, grave to the pitch of solemnity, vivid believers in a future life and judgment by an ethical god after death, probably very sober in conduct. The Babylonians, on the contrary, had no belief in a future life of reward or punishment—they thought the soul just wandered in some misty underground world which did not interest them—and had lascivious goddesses like Ishtar, with a prostitution of all women in her honour. . . . What would one expect?

Scholars have known for half a century that all this is preposterous, as we saw in the case of Egypt. Take the main point of the indictment—the lascivious Ishtar and the statement of Herodotus that every woman in Babylon had to sacrifice her virginity in the temple. It is strange that impartial writers like Sir J. G. Frazer who accept the story of Herodotus have not warned their readers that the same Greek writer represents the Babylonians as far from prurient. The women, Herodotus says, loathed the duty; and in another passage, or another

fable—for he does not seem to have visited Babylon—he tells us that their attitude to sex was such that a husband and wife had, after intercourse, to sit up all night on opposite sides of a sort of altar, on which incense burned, and to purify themselves before they touched any of their crockery.

Since this sacred prostitution which Herodotus alleges is the only thing which nine people out of ten know, or suppose they know, about ancient Babylon, we may examine it further; and the result may be taken as typical for the stories about the sins of the ancient world. It is in the first place intrinsically absurd. Herodotus does not say that the traffic was in a temple of Ishtar, but of Mylitta, and the experts find no trace of such a deity in Babylonia. It is, further, quite ridiculous to suppose that, as Herodotus says, a young woman, however ill-favoured, would have to wait—in a great city full of rough workers, sailors, etc.—for several years to find a purchaser of her virginity for the Babylonian equivalent of sixpence! But the legend that every woman in the city had thus to sacrifice her virginity in the temple is decisively refuted by the fact that the surviving marriage tablets commonly state, as every Assyriologist for decades has pointed out, that the bride is a virgin. The experts conclude that at the most there may have been some practice of sacred prostitution in an ancient temple. Such a practice is mentioned in a moral treatise of uncertain date quoted in Sir A. E. Wallis Budge's *Babylonian Life and History* (1925). But in this very reference the Babylonian youth is sternly warned to keep away from "the maiden of Ishtar," whereas Herodotus makes the temple commerce an act of piety.

This fragment of moral literature for men which I quote has exactly the same sentiments as a moral lecture of our time would have, and it is monotheistic. "Thou shalt worship thy God daily," it says, and do that which

is "acceptable to God." The religious literature, which is abundant, is, in fact, steeped in ethical sentiments. It is regrettable that so good an historian as the late Prof. Breasted, though not an authority on Babylonia, said in his *Conquest of Civilization* that the religion "never proclaimed the rights of the poor and humble" and was poor in ethical quality. We saw that the slave (who could even marry a free woman and his children would be free), the worker, and the woman had exceptional protection in Babylonian law; and all the expert writers on this aspect of Babylonian religion (Budge, Jastrow, Pinches, Baudissin, Langdon, etc.) show how pervasively ethical it was. Babylon, instead of being looser than other cities, positively groaned with that "sense of sin" of which inexpert writers describe it as devoid; for the Babylonian believed that every toothache, every sort of affliction, meant that in punishment of some sin the gods had permitted some of the innumerable devils to torment him.

Ishtar herself, "the Queen of Heaven," had become an ethical deity. Dr. S. Langdon, who shows this in his *Tammuz and Ishtar*, quotes a tablet in which the goddess falls with fury upon a maid for sexual transgressions, and he gives "penitential palms" to her which put her in much the same position as Mary is in the Roman Church. Beyond question she had been in ancient times the goddess of love and fertility and had been honoured by sacred prostitution, but that had ended ages before she became the patroness of Assyria, the goddess of war and of law and order. With the fall of Assyria she lost her martial attributes and remained the guardian of law and right conduct.

Apart from some of the Hebrew writers—and one might as well expect a temperate judgment about the Japanese from a Chinese writer as consult these about the vices of Babylon—the only serious indictment of the morals of

Babylonian women is contained in the work of a Latin writer who, in a life of Alexander the Great, says that Alexander's Greek officers found bacchanalian banquets in the city. But, apart from the fact that these officers bitterly resented the lingering of Alexander in Babylon, this refers to a period more than two centuries after the Golden Age. It is quite possible that the Persians, who became very corrupt when they left their hills for the rich cities of the plain, corrupted the wealthier class in Babylon.

It is a long and fascinating story how in this millennium in the east the Sky-Father god, with his stricter ethic, defeated the cult of the Mother-Earth goddess, with its natural lenience for sex, but it cannot be told here. Long before the time of Nebuchadrezzar the struggle was over in Mesopotamia. The licence of Babylon is a myth. Its people seem to have been actually graver and stricter than the Egyptians. They owed their Golden Age to the genius of a great general and great statesman, and his feebler successors could not maintain their heritage against the powerful enemies who watched and waited on the northern horizon.

CHAPTER III

THE EARLIEST GREEK CIVILIZATION

GREEK writers tell us that at one time, early in their history as a civilized race, two armies were engaged in Asia Minor when the sun was mysteriously darkened. The soldiers suspended the fight and gazed in horror at the sky. The writers add that in the city of Miletus, on the Mediterranean coast of Asia Minor, a Greek sage, Thales, explained to his fellow-citizens that what they regarded as a supernatural portent was a natural movement of the heavenly bodies; and the modern astronomer, whose calculating mind can reach back or forward through millennia of time, finds that there was in fact an eclipse of the sun, which would be visible in Asia Minor, in the year 585. That was the middle of the reign of Nebuchadrezzar, and no one doubts that Thales made use of the tables of eclipses which had been compiled by the priest-astronomers of Babylon. The new period of history which opens with the appearance of the Greeks was thus inaugurated before the last brilliant phase of the more ancient civilization had ended.

The truth is that our division of history into two eras, as if some flaming sword had cut the thread of human destiny in the days of Augustus Cæsar, is to-day merely a chronological convenience. Every division of history leaves very ragged edges, but a modern historian must count it a nearer approximation to the truth to say that the ancient world ended with the ephemeral splendour of Babylon under Nebuchadrezzar, and that a new era opened about the same time in three centres which lay far beyond its frontiers—Greece, India, and China.

Under the despotic rule of the older monarchies and priesthoods no advance in the direction of our modern ideals was possible. The full development even of art was hindered, while science, philosophy, literature, and the softening of the harsh lights and shadows of the social and political world had to await the inauguration of an age of freedom.

This age opened about the year 600 B.C. In China and India it began with the freedom of discussion which produced Kung-fu-tse and Buddha, and it culminated in the first Golden Age of China under the Han Emperors and the Golden Age of India under Asoka. But the more important and more rapid development occurred on the frontiers of Asia and Europe, where a new race took over the torch from the sinking empires of Nearer Asia and created a nobler and purer art, a higher literature, the first forms of philosophy and speculative science, and the political regime of civic self-government. The period, which lasted for 1,000 years (broadly, 600 B.C. to A.D. 400), proved to be a false dawn of the modern type of civilization, but in that one-fifth of the entire course of history we are compelled to recognize nearly a half of the brilliant chapters which we call Golden Ages.

The period which we approach in this chapter is probably the only one whose title to be included in the roll of honour would be challenged by any historian, but the challenge is easily met. It would be based upon a claim that Greek life first soared to the height of a Golden Age in fifth-century Athens. Here one of the unsound traditions of our literature colours the judgment, and not a few recent scholars have assailed it. Sir William Ramsay, for instance, says in his *Asianic Elements in Greek Civilization* (1927) :—

The general tendency in modern estimates of Greek thought is to regard Athens as the Eye of Greece,

the Mother of Arts and Eloquence, whereas the true source of almost every branch of literature and science, and the earliest great names in almost every department, belong to the cities and colonies of the old Ionians (p. 4).

On the narrow strip of the western coast of Asia Minor which was known as Ionia there arose for the first time in history a number of self-governing cities in which men found it possible to flout autocrats and to speculate upon life independently of priestly traditions. They were wealthy cities, closely linked with each other, and with a more stimulating cosmopolitan population than had ever before been known. They combined the vigour of a new and adventurous race, the Greeks, with all that was best in the long experience of the older empires.

In this favourable atmosphere a new and higher standard of architecture developed, poetry and prose burst the traditional bonds and carried literature to a higher level, and the speculations about life of priests who brooded in isolation from it were replaced by a direct and manly investigation of Nature. The Ionic style of architecture is the noblest that the artist has yet conceived. The Ionic School of philosophy put thinkers upon the path which has led to modern science. If the historian declines to award Ionia his gold medal because he does not find that clotting of wealth in the possession of princes and nobles which distracts, or used to distract, his attention from the condition of the mass of the people, he nevertheless admits a rapid advance in the direction of modern civilization and a life in many respects superior to that of the older empires. And, since these accomplishments were, in their highest form, confined to a period hardly longer than the reign of Nebuchadrezzar, we must surely call this a Golden Age.

In the days of a cruder psychology men spoke of this

as the first triumph of "the Greek genius," but history has not lost its fascination because we have discarded this iridescent verbiage. The region in which we find this notable advance of the race is that sunny western fringe of Asia Minor which looks out upon the blue waters of the Mediterranean in their loveliest area. The time is the first half of the sixth century. The people, whom we call Ionian Greeks, were really Greeks who had long mingled and interbred with older inhabitants of the district. A few words about these inhabitants are desirable.

Most of the writers who form the opinions of the general public, to whom the works of experts are usually closed by a heavy and confused style and an excess of details and uncouth names, linger at the stage at which scholarship was half a century or more ago. They talk about great empires growing out of the soil in Egypt and Mesopotamia, and they then describe the flowering of the Greek genius, under the influence of the southern sun and the inspiring scenery of the Mediterranean, 1,000 miles away. The truth is that, as we have realized for decades, the entire area from Egypt or Babylon to Crete was civilized long before the Greeks emerged from barbarism. A high and in many respects singularly modern culture—the *Ægean* civilization—spread from Crete, over the intervening islands, to the western fringe of Asia Minor, and another great kingdom—that of the Hittites—covered the larger part of Asia Minor.

The first Greeks (using the term broadly) who trekked from the Danube or Balkan valleys across the mountains to the sea savagely destroyed the *Ægean* civilization—they were as raw and destructive as the Goths and Vandals—and refugees from it settled in large numbers on the coast of Asia Minor. The Phœnicians, moreover, who made a far greater contribution to civilization than is generally realized, developed their splendid navigation and commerce when their Cretan rivals were destroyed,

and they also made large settlements on this coastal fringe of Asia Minor. In the meantime a section of the Aryan (European) race had crossed the Black Sea and pushed between the coastal fringe and the kingdom of the Hittites; and these Lydians formed a very prosperous and most humane civilization of their own. If we reflect, in addition, that merchants and travellers from Babylon and Egypt visited these coastal cities, we realize that the first Greeks to arrive there found an advanced and cosmopolitan population already settled, and peacefully mingled with them.

The man who would thoroughly enjoy and profit by his historical reading ought always to have a map—preferably a physical map—at his elbow. With that and the short summary I have given he will easily understand how the conditions for the making of a Golden Age were provided on that beautiful coast, chiefly from where Smyrna is to-day to where the eastward bend of the coast begins. That region became Ionia, with twelve stirring cities and a number of colonies.

Glancing at the map of Greece itself, you will gather why some of the Greeks crossed to Asia Minor. The pioneers of the race did not, as it was once the fashion to say, pass from a dreary north into a smiling land whose beauty awakened their slumbering genius. I once travelled in the height of summer from the south of Serbia and Bulgaria—which was, roundly, their starting point—to Adrianople and back through Salonica to Athens. The northern region was, in summer, far more pleasant than Greece and the mountains one had to cross to reach it. Only in spring is the country round Athens really lovely. Indeed, most of Greece is mountainous and barren, and the valleys, separated from each other by mountain ridges, became overpopulated by the descendants of the immigrant Greek farmers. We must remember that these valleys had a native population.

before the Greeks arrived. This over-population caused bitter quarrels and drove large numbers of the Greeks to emigrate.

We need not here discuss the waves of migration and the various types of Greeks, but may confine ourselves to the section of the race—the Ionians—which made the deepest mark in history. And this was from no special “genius” or racial superiority. These tribes pushed their way to the region where Athens is to-day, and from there, as over-crowding and the avarice of landowners pressed them, they set out across the *Ægæan* Sea, where a cluster of islands invited them onward to the coast of Asia Minor 150 miles away. No one who has made that incomparable journey in fine weather will fail to understand how alluring it must have been. There they found men of half a dozen superior races. They exchanged the shaggy goatskin tunics of their fathers for the bright and elegant garments of the Syrians, Cretans, and Phœnicians, and were initiated to the full ideals of civilization. In Greek literature we see their growth from the semi-barbaric epics of “Homer”—the writers of which tradition traces to the islands, where so many of the Ionians lingered—to the graceful lyricists of the time of Sappho and Alcæus, then to the merchant-philosophers of Miletus and the large cities, and long afterwards in a list of names of great men and women of Ionian extraction, such as the historian Herodotus, the father of medicine Hippocrates, the gifted Aspasia, and the philosopher-scientists Heracleitus and Epicurus.

Wealth was, as usual, the foundation of the Golden Age into which they rose by about the year 600; for in the old world leisure and culture appeared only where there was wealth. For this development the coast was ideally situated. I pointed out in the first chapter how the river was the first great civilizing agency, since it most readily facilitated that peaceful contact of diverse bodies of men

upon which social progress depends, and that once the great rivers had rendered this service and the ancient nations had a uniform culture imposed upon them, the pace of progress relaxed.

The next progressive phase is often called the Aryan Age, as if the peoples of Europe had some mystic superiority which awaited only the opportunity to assert itself. But the truth is that when the movement of peoples which overpopulation has caused throughout history—particularly in the second millennium B.C.—had shifted the scene of progress to the Mediterranean the original stimulus of advance was recovered. Once more the ship became the emblem and the instrument of progress. The eastern Mediterranean became the broad theatre of a higher cosmopolitan race, and cities, linked by navigation, rose on its shores from the mouth of the Nile, along the Phœnician and Syrian coasts, to Asia Minor and Greece: later to Italy and all parts of the sea which had become, to translate the name we give to it, the Centre of the Earth.

On the quays and in the streets of such Ionian cities as Miletus and Ephesus men of half a dozen races and religions—Egyptians and Phœnicians, Syrians and Babylonians, Lydians and Hittites—mingled with the Greeks, or the men of mixed blood who called themselves Greeks. For centuries the Phœnician merchants had taken their goods to every part of the Mediterranean, and their best markets for their fine textiles and glass and metal-work were now in this region. The most notable man of the age—the philosopher Thales—seems to have been of mixed Phœnician and Greek blood. Colonies spread up the Black Sea and on the coast to the north of Greece, making new markets. Ships came from Damascus, Tarsus, etc., bringing the trade of Syrians and Hittites; and from the interior of Asia Minor caravans brought other and even richer merchandise overland.

All this might be taken for granted by any man who knows the conditions, but modern research, archæological and historical, has enabled us to see a more definite importance in the situation. The colonial Greeks enjoyed, in their more stimulating atmosphere, freedom from that oppressive weight of tribal tradition and of royal and priestly authority which still hampered the Greeks of the motherland. The nearest throne was 200 miles away, at the capital of the Lydians—Sardis—and these Lydians were themselves Aryans who, though they retained royalty, were to a great extent independent of their old traditions without contracting those of the orientals. They became rich—Crœsus, it is enough to recall, was a King of Lydia—and along the valley which opened into the interior from what is now Smyrna they conducted a very busy trade with the Ionians.

But what chiefly interests us for the moment is that these Lydians contributed to the heritage of the race a doctrine of the brotherhood of men which had very practical consequences in the Greek-Roman world. The Hittites, who had once controlled the part of Asia Minor in which they settled, had, like the Cretans, a supreme veneration for a female deity—Ma, the goddess of fertility, or Mother Earth. Here I must not linger to describe their armies of stern Amazon priestesses and the cities they ruled. It is enough that the Lydians adopted in its most genial form the corollary that all men are brothers under a common mother. In fact, they avoided the word "brothers," which is apt to sound rhetorical, and laid down universal friendship as the chief social law or condition. "Friend of All Men" was the highest tribute they inscribed on a man's tombstone. Happiness—indeed, pleasure—was set up as the goal of life. There was no gayer city in the world than Sardis, with its remarkable Pleasure Park and its fame for cooking and good living; and the wealth of Crœsus reminds us that this did not

prevent them from conducting business with great skill and prosperity. They were the first to use coined money.

These Lydians received the trading wealth of the Hittites who lived on the higher plateaux and transmitted it down the valley to the Ionian ports. They not only gave the Greeks of the coast their system of weights and measures and minted money, but they also inspired them with their doctrine of the brotherhood of man and its embodiment in unions of the workers and a general gaiety of life. Through the Ionians, who were the leaders of the Greek world from Asia Minor to Italy until, at a later date, circumstances gave Athens the lead, this finer spirit spread far and wide, to reach its highest pitch of efficacy centuries later in the Stoic-Epicurean inspiration of the Roman world. Our standard authority on the ancient world, the *Cambridge Ancient History*, says: "Typical European Humanism may justly be said to have been developed in the cities of Asia" (II, 550).

This amiable mood, the fair scenery, "the finest climate in the world" (as Herodotus calls it), and the accumulating wealth led also to a refining of literature. The writers of the Homeric poetry, two or three centuries earlier, had, as I said, belonged to this region. Earlier migrants had brought the rude chants which celebrated fights and adventures of the heroic days, and the Ionians had set them in finer epic verse. Lyric poetry did not develop until—as the name suggests—the lyre, to which it was sung, was perfected; and at first it was Greek cousins north and south of Ionia, but on this same fortunate coast and the islands adjacent to it, who developed it. On the island of Lesbos especially, which had become rich with shipping and trade, this new and more beautiful form of poetry was cultivated; and Prof. Gilbert Murray, Prof. D. M. Robinson, Mr. G. W. Botsford, and other leading authorities repudiate the charge against the poet Sappho and the women of Lesbos which we still maintain in our use

of the words "Sapphic" and "Lesbian." But the Ionians in turn took up the lyric and popularized it throughout the Greek world. For nearly two centuries before Athens gained the lead Ionian prose and the Ionian dialect of Greek set the standard over the whole Greek-speaking world.

Another reason why the Ionians held this commanding position while the Athenians were still poor and little regarded is that they more than any other Greeks enjoyed a long period of peace. It is significant that, while the Attic (Athenian) form of Greek speech replaced the Ionian in general use, the word for peace (*Eirene*) remained Ionian. There was, it is true, plenty of struggle in the cities. Like the Greeks everywhere, they had, after dispensing with their petty kings, to make their way laboriously towards democracy through acrid conflicts with dictators, oligarchies, and aristocracies. Cities quarrelled with each other, and jealousy prevented them from uniting in a single State, as Thales urged them to do. This would prove a fatal weakness when, at a later date, the Lydians had an ambitious and greedy monarch, but during the building of the Golden Age the Lydians were friendly, and the spirit of the self-governing cities of the coast enriched the mind of the new world with a love of independence and freedom which the stifling conditions of the older empires had not suffered to develop.

The more brilliant literature which Athens produced two centuries later drove into oblivion the literature of the Phœnicians, which was probably a most valuable link between the old world and the new, and of the Ionians, but from scattered references we can form an interesting picture of life in the Ionian civilization. Miletus was the largest and most prosperous city. It was built on a narrow promontory which pushed out into the blue sea, with fringes of foam, a few miles south of the island of Samos, and in its chief harbour, which was symbolically

guarded by two colossal stone lions, ships from all parts of the world moored at three lines of quays with colonnaded background. The city itself had a very large commercial fleet and nearly a hundred war vessels to protect it in case of need. These ships sailed as far as Gaul and Spain and up the Black Sea, taking not only the wares of the Lydians and the Hittites, but also the products of the famous workshops of Miletus. Their woollen cloth, dyed in rich violet, purple, scarlet, and saffron, and often beautifully embroidered, was esteemed everywhere, and they were not less skilful in metal and other crafts. An Ionian is said to have invented a process of welding iron.

Life on the sea-front, where the merchant-princes lived, and in the Agora (central square) and chief streets, was joyous and colourful, the brilliant sunshine and temperate climate encouraging the love of vivid finery. The oriental fashion of dress was adopted with certain modification, and the voluptuous taste of the Lydians was shared. Even the men wore tastefully embroidered tunics and cloaks, and the Ionian ladies were famous for their beauty and elegance. Over loose robes of fine, often transparent, linen, carefully draped in artistic folds, they wore light dresses of the finest cloth of the time; and their blonde hair, confined with a Lydian head-dress, was elaborately curled and dressed with perfumed oil. They—I speak here of the richer women—wore soft Lydian sandals and gold bracelets and diadems. Greek blood and the Greek love of open-air exercise had brought into the cities the graceful and radiant type of womanhood with which the ancient vases and statues have made us familiar, and at Miletus they had all the resources of the civilized world, employed with a perfectly developed taste, to adorn it. Ionian women were, says Prof. Garde, “the living symbols of the most voluptuous and refined civilization which Greece ever knew.”

It is said that the men of the rich class adopted the oriental custom of confining their wives and daughters in secluded women's quarters of the house. It is misleading to speak of this as an oriental custom in ancient times, since, as we saw, the women of Egypt and Babylonia had enjoyed freedom and equality during thousands of years. One wonders if the Greeks needed to borrow it at all, for it was the primitive Aryan custom, maintained until well into historical times both by the Greeks and Romans, to keep the wife and daughter drastically subject to the man.

However that may be, the practice of excluding their wives and daughters from the opulent banquets which they adopted from the Lydians naturally led to the appearance of a more or less professional body of beautiful women, beautifully robed and highly educated, who shared the feasts with the men. Aspasia, the companion of Pericles, was an Ionian and is the best-known representative of the class. A good deal has been written about the morals of these *hetairai*, who passed from Ionia to Athens and the rest of the Greek world, but the result of exact inquiry agrees with a common-sense view of the matter. Like the Geishas of Japan, their function was to be entertaining companions, but doubtless in many cases they went beyond this.

This beautiful type of Ionian womanhood had a beneficent influence upon the development of art. The abundance of stone—even marble of the most suitable description was found on the islands—and the beauty of the models gave the sculptor a new impulse, and his art rose rapidly towards that height which makes Greek sculpture supreme for all time. Architecture also was affected, and quickly acquired the lightness and grace which distinguish the Ionic style. Greeks who preferred the earlier and heavier Doric style complained that the Ionic was effeminate, which is at least a tribute to the influence of the women. No doubt painting also advanced,

but we have to be content with stories of the marvellous skill of Greek painters. Bronze and other metal work shared the advance. The passion for beauty, as well as for a free and joyous life, spread from Ionia over the entire new world.

Some writers still repeat the old shibboleths about the Greek genius for art, the Hebrew genius for morality, and the Roman genius for law and organization. These empty and sonorous phrases were no more based upon sound history than upon sound psychology. The art of Athens, which the writer generally has in mind, was a higher development, two centuries later, of the art of Ionia, and was largely created by men who were not Athenians; and the artists of Ionia were men of mixed race, stimulated by a high prosperity, in an exceptionally genial environment. Moreover, just as Athens is almost as well known for philosophy as for art, so the Ionian cities led the way also in this field of culture.

It was in the city of Miletus that philosophic thinking, as distinct from the word-spinning of the Egyptian priests and Hindu recluses, was born. Thales, a prosperous merchant of mixed blood and apparently the most influential of the citizens, whose date is fairly fixed by the eclipse of the year 585, is called "the father of philosophy." The word must, however, be taken in its literal meaning of "a love of wisdom," for Thales speculated upon Nature and life rather than indulged in metaphysical brooding. He is said to have learned the elements of science in Egypt and Babylonia, and we may at least be sure that he learned in the cities of Phoenicia what the older empires had to tell. Knowledge was in Ionia not merely transferred from the priests to the leisured laity to its great advantage, but it now looked to the study of Nature as its chief source.

We have no concern here with the line of cosmic speculation which begins, as far as our knowledge goes—

doubtless he had lay forerunners both in Phœnicia and Babylon—in Thales and his contemporaries and successors, several of whom belonged to Miletus and others to the Ionian cities of Ephesus and Colophon. The importance of their work is seen in the fact that this Ionic school eventually discovered the atomic nature of matter and the evolution of all things. Even the later and greater teachers of the school were linked with Ionia. Heracleitus was born in Ephesus; Leucippus was an Ionian; the great Democritus had an Ionian teacher, a refugee from the cities after their fall; and the greatest of them all, Epicurus, came to Athens from the islands.

Since it was men like Thales who formed the ruling class in the cities, we perceive that their inspiration was not in religion. We have only late and not very reliable reports of the opinions of Thales, but the best of them represent him as saying that the gods as well as all natural objects were evolved from water; and Gomperz says of the rather vague philosophy of his friend and fellow-townsman Anaximander that "nothing seemed to him divine but matter." In cities where a dozen religions had their temples we should expect this scepticism in the creative educated class, and the ethical maxims attributed to Thales are purely humanitarian and of a high order. But the account I have given of the development of the Ionian civilization makes it superfluous to inquire into the question of religion.

The same consideration dispenses us from examining the scanty evidence about morals. We find neither increase of moral and religious earnestness in the period of progress nor a decline before the fall. The cult of friendship which was taken over from Lydia suggests that the social-moral qualities were richly cultivated, and in regard to sex we have the usual contradictory statements, the plain issue of which is that there were as many types of character in Ionia as in modern cities. What I

have already said implies a considerable liberty in sexual relations; yet it was precisely in one of these Ionian cities, Ephesus, that the Asiatic cult of the Mother goddess was most strictly sublimated. The great temple of Artemis (Diana) at Ephesus, the building of which is said to have taken more than 100 years and to which the Lydians as well as all the cities of the coast contributed, was the finest of its age. But the immense body of priestesses who served it were under a life vow of virginity. We must not mention the sybaritic banquets, with Lydian aphrodisiacs in the wine, and forget that the second greatest city of Ionia had as its central feature one of the noblest monuments of asceticism.

The end was as secular and as sudden as that of Babylon. The Lydian King Crœsus was not content with the mild protectorate which his predecessors had exercised over the Ionian cities, and he strengthened his influence over them. It was at first so little irksome that they continued to give their lives to trade and pleasure, art and philosophy, and failed to realize that a greater and more dangerous power appeared upon the far horizon when Persia, flushed with its conquest of Babylon, turned towards Asia Minor. To suggest that the Ionians were decadent because they were overborne by the vast mercenary armies of the Persians is absurd. Their environment had directed them to the arts of peace just as the situation of the Persians had moved them to cultivate the art of war. Persia left a good deal of autonomy to the cities of the coast, but the free and independent spirit of the best of the Ionians rebelled, and they—artists, philosophers, and merchants—returned across the sea to the land from which their fathers had come, to sow the seed of their culture in the Greek communities which now ranged from Thrace to Sicily.

CHAPTER IV

THE GOLDEN AGE OF ATHENS

THE name of Athens still shines in all literature more brightly than the name of any other of the thousands of cities that man has built since the days of the Pyramids. A single building—indeed, the yellow broken shell of a building—the ancient Temple of the Virgin Athene, enriches it more generously than the solemn pile of a mediæval cathedral or the proudest and costliest group of modern buildings enriches any other city in Europe. Even the uncultivated traveller holds his breath when, as his train speeds through the outskirts of Athens, he first sees it on its hill in the light of the setting sun; and his veneration deepens when at last he mounts the hill and gazes upon it. Yet this is only one part of the heritage of Athens. A stone's-throw away is the field in which the world's first democracy decided its destiny. Below you is the theatre in which tragedy and comedy first reached the level of high art. Beyond is the site of the public square under the colonnades of which men once discussed philosophy. Farther afield is the Stadium—so solidly built more than 2,000 years ago that it serves to-day—in which the world learned that the exercises of peace can invigorate as effectively as the exertions of war.

While we acknowledge this debt and pay this homage to ancient Athens we may interpret it without repeating mystic phrases like “the genius of the Athenian” or of the Greek. Not only were the early Greeks, as we saw, the Goths and Vandals of the ancient world, but most sections of the race never rose to any high historical distinction. Nor did the Attic Greeks themselves for many

centuries give promise of a golden future. They were among the last to trudge south over the Macedonian mountains and, finding most of the desirable valleys in the possession of their cousins, they spread over the ragged eastern promontory (Attica) which thrusts out into the *Ægean* Sea. Nearly half of it consists of mountains, and these offered only pasture for sheep on their lower slopes, while the maritime fringe which was to become so famous in history seemed to these rude farmers for the most part a sandy waste. How could they suspect what treasures of fine clay, limestone, marble, and even silver were hidden below the surface? Large numbers of them took ship and created Ionia, and the main body plodded on. A Cretan sage, Epimenides, visited Athens at the time when the Ionian cities were brightest with wealth and art, and he had to give the citizens almost elementary lessons in civilization.

But this is no place to tell the early history of Athens. In spite of its scanty resources and the exhausting struggles of rich and poor, Attica was too near the islands of the *Ægean* and the cities of Asia Minor to escape the inevitable stimulation to advance. In time it found its treasure of fine clay and made such progress in ceramics that even the Ionians were glad to exchange their fine stuffs for its painted vases and amphoræ. It found the marble quarries of Pentelicus a dozen miles away, and learned the art of sculpture. It discovered its silver-beds and the splendid shipping possibilities of the Peiræus, the nearest harbour. When the Ionian cities fell to Persia, numbers of their artists, teachers, and merchants came back to the Attica from which their ancestors had sailed, and guided the fumbling hands. What we call the Attic genius was, says Prof. Jardé, "in great part made by the mating of the Ionic spirit with the Dorian." But increasing prosperity and oversea trade were the basis. We still await the historian who will have the courage to tell the world that

the development of trade was a more important factor than religious or moral enthusiasm in the creation of new civilizations.

This slow, one might almost say humdrum, progress of Athens in the sixth century was first arrested, then stimulated, by the Persian invasion. At the historic battle of Marathon (490 B.C.) the Attic Greeks put in the field a force of only about 10,000 men, though every farmer and every cobbler were called out. It gives us some measure of the modest position of Athens and its province 100 years after the time of Thales. But the brilliant victory of the Athenians, followed by others in which they completed the rout of the vast Persian army, put their name on the lips of every Greek. A magnificent spirit was now combined with a new opportunity, as the trade of the Ionian cities languished. Athens headed the confederation of the Greek States against Persia.

One may read that a religious revival was part of the new enthusiasm, since Zeus and Athene had proved their superiority to the gods of Persia. Granted, but it does not concern us here. The Golden Age would not begin for nearly another half-century, when the religious fervour had abated. In fact, during this period slavery grew in Athens, the rich bringing kidnapped barbarians to serve the new industries; and Athens developed an imperialistic hardness, imposing its rule upon other States and confiscating their League-funds for its own purposes.

The religious revival inspired neither these vices nor the rapid progress. The Athenians had come home to find their city a bed of ashes, and the story of the splendid co-operation of all classes and both sexes, of slave and free, in the rebuilding ought to be taught in every school in the world, and is taught in none. Amid the work of restoration and fortification the masterly tragedians *Æschylus* and *Sophocles* arose, filling the mind of the democracy—at this time the Athenians finally became a complete de-

mocracy—with large ideas and noble sentiments; and there were great artists like Myron, whose bronze Disk-Thrower (*Discobolos*) is still treasured. But the Golden Age did not begin and the noble temples and exquisite statuary which it would produce were not raised until half a century after the battle of Marathon.

A high prosperity was, as usual, the primary condition of the Golden Age. The second was, as is the case of Ionia and Thebes and Babylon, peace; for during the earlier years of the reconstruction Athens had little war. But conditions are not causes. Persia had become immeasurably more wealthy than Greece, yet in spite of its elegant art and luxury we do not count this period of its history a Golden Age. It concentrated its wealth upon the glorification of a despotic monarch—upon gorgeousness rather than beauty—whereas in Athens the wealth was entrusted to an idealist democratic statesman to expend upon the civic home of the people. In Persia the vanity of the monarch turned back to the older world of opulent palaces for his standards of art, while the leading men of Athens looked into the new culture of the world for noble forms which they could make yet nobler.

It has been much disputed whether great men make history or are made by it—by the achievement of the whole people—but there is no single law. Thebes might have been splendid, but certainly less splendid, without Amenhotep III, and Babylon would never have reached the glamour of a Golden Age without Nebuchadrezzar. On the other hand, Elizabeth did not make the Elizabethan Age, or Louis XIV the Golden Age of France.

In the case of Athens it would be difficult to exaggerate the personal importance of the great statesman, Pericles, who presided over it during the Golden Age. Of distinguished Athenian birth and careful education in his youth, he had the further advantage of the tuition and close companionship of the leading Ionian thinker of the

time, Anaxagoras, and the more intimate companionship of the greatest of Ionian women—indeed, one of the most gifted of her sex—the famous Aspasia. He could not wed her, because she was not an Athenian and the law forbade it, but with her beauty and accomplishments and fine character she made his house the sanctuary of all who had outstanding ability and shared their ideal. That ideal is thus defined by Abbot, the modern biographer of Pericles :—

The wish to give to every citizen, in and through the State, not only the blessings of peace and prosperity but the still greater blessing of unimpeded action in all noble aspirations.

He was a democrat who saw and deplored the weakness of democracy—it had already given birth in Athens to what we may justly call demagogacy—yet he, in spite of his enemies and detractors, swayed the ignorant body of citizens to permit him to give them a city whose fame, after twenty-three centuries, shows no sign of diminishing.

This fame is principally due to the artistic splendour of Athens. We saw that the Persian invaders had destroyed the old city. In the intervening fifty years since that time it had been restored and many public buildings erected. The central square (Agora) had been laid out : on one side of it the Painted Colonnade (Stoa) in which Zeno would later expound his “ Stoic ” philosophy, on the other a group of not inelegant public buildings in limestone. But the steep rocky hill (Acropolis) which towered above it, as the great rock rises in the centre of Edinburgh to-day, still bore only the scattered ruins of the old temples. One imagines Pericles and Aspasia and their brilliant friends—the thinker Anaxagoras, the greatest sculptor of all time Pheidias, the great dramatists *Aeschylus* and *Sophocles*, the father of history *Herodotus*, and all that was brilliant in Athens—contemplating the ruin on summer days from

some garden in which figs and cypresses gave shade to the group. From their talk grew the plan of making the summit of the hill the noblest scene upon which the sun has ever shone.

A road wound round the steep hill, which is about 500 feet high, and at the upper end of this the visitor faced the Propylæa, or Gates, of the sacred enclosure: a superb cluster of lofty arches or porches, in almost transparent white marble with delicate blue veins, resting on a basis of black marble. In the enclosure itself stood a magnificent bronze statue, thirty feet high, of Athene by Pheidias, but her temple drew the eye from all other objects on the hill.

Photographs of it will be familiar to the reader, though they convey only a poor impression of its perfect beauty. It was only sixty-four feet high, and the interior was only 100 feet in length, but it must have looked in the old days like a superb carving from a single block of translucent white marble. The stones of which its columns were composed were so finely joined together that the joints were imperceptible, and the architects and sculptors had realized that if they gave a certain calculated curve or waviness to the lines of the columns and the building the beauty would be enhanced. There is not, in fact, a single straight line in the structure, yet the grace and symmetry, the blend of strength, simplicity, and purity, are unmatched in the whole world of art. All the devices that the artist had won in 100 years of Ionian experience—the style is the Doric softened by Ionian feeling—were in the mind of the sculptors and architects.

Without rival also are the sculptures which decorated the exterior. Pheidias himself carved, in a harder (Parian) white marble, the figures on the front and rear pediments; and even in the state in which we find some of them in the British Museum to-day, callously battered in the miserable wars of Turks and Venetians in the

seventeenth century, they profoundly impress even the artistically illiterate. Doubtless Pheidias had to leave to his pupils the carving of the great frieze, a reproduction of the civic procession in honour of Athene, which crowned the sides, but inside the temple was another of his works, indeed, in the opinion of the old world, the greatest of them all: a statue of Athene, forty feet high, largely built of ivory, and with £150,000 worth of gold used in the decoration of her arms and rich robes. Outside was a second and less beautiful temple in which the sacred heirlooms of the Attic race, at which the artists probably smiled, were housed, and statues and other works of art were scattered over the open summit. As one walked among them one picked out other beautiful temples of white marble shining here and there among the houses and gardens of the city below.

It is useless to attempt to enable one who has not at least seen the ruins to visualize this architectural beauty of Athens. Take a large photograph of the Parthenon, the old Temple of the Virgin (*Parthenos*), and dream it back into rounded life, the pure white carving backed by the brilliant reds and blues which the Greeks loved, the southern sun drenching it with light, and you get a faint impression of the new gift, perfection of beauty, which the Greeks had brought to the world.

That passion for beauty and skill in creating it pervaded the whole life of the educated community and, in time, the entire Greek world. Greek writers of the age claim that their painters were as gifted as their sculptors—that, for instance, the birds would fly in and peck at a picture of a bowl of fruit. We take their word that painting also reached the note of genius, and we have proof enough in surviving bronzes and vases of the general demand for high art. Not less was beauty of the living face and figure esteemed, as the portrait-statues show; and the development of a fine system of athletics and gymnastics

is not the least of the contributions of the new race. Music was seriously studied and carried far beyond the stage it had reached in the older world. *μεγάλη*

The development of the theatre was an even more distinctive contribution of the Greeks to civilization. Egypt had had sacred pageants or mystery dramas, and outside of the wonderful palace of the Cretan princes at Cnossos we find a small enclosure which we call a theatre, though it seems to have been used only for dances and vaulting over a bull. It was Greece that created the theatre. Starting, doubtless, from the antics of villagers on festivals round the statue of their Nature-god, the Greeks had elaborated the mummery until, in the fifth century, it evoked the tragic masterpieces of *Æschylus* and *Sophocles*, the more poignant because more real and more human tragedies of *Euripides*, and the biting satirical comedies of *Aristophanes*: all still in the small front rank of the world's literature. The open-air theatre, the tiers of its seats cut out of the stone of the Acropolis, could hold 20,000 men—the entire adult male population of free Athens. At the popular watering-place Epidaurus, a few miles away, was an open-air theatre that had seats for 40,000 spectators.

It is often said that the workers of Athens took no interest in the works of art which adorned their city, even that they slighted them as costly toys of the aristocracy, and this description of the entire body of them listening for hours to the tragedies of *Æschylus* and *Sophocles*, for which even in Prof. Gilbert Murray's brilliant translation a middle-class audience could not be found to-day, seems to give us a different idea of their quality. The truth is that the great tragedies were by no means the daily fare of the Athenian theatre. Comedy was more popular, and there was a third type of play, ordinary drama, which seems to have been the work of inferior playwrights and has not survived. Yet the

Greek workers *did* sit through the long and sombre tragedies, both at Athens and at the Olympic Games which were held every five years.

Our modern Olympic Games, which attract all the vices as well as the virtues of our sport, seem either to have adopted the name in mockery, or their organizers did not trouble to read a line about ancient Olympia. In the ruins of the marble city which the Greeks built specially for the purpose of the Games we found one of the most superb statues of the world, the Hermes of Praxiteles, and we now know that the place was a shrine of art as well as of athletic skill. Pheidias adorned its exquisite temple with a gold and ivory statue, sixty feet high, of Zeus, and the town-enclosure, in which only the priests and officials lived, the people from all parts sleeping under the trees or in tents, was so richly decorated that travellers 600 years later counted 3,000 statues. To this town, every five years, white-robed heralds summoned the Greek people: to listen to the great tragedies and to musical and poetical contests, as well as to see the races and athletic struggles in the open air. "Sound mind in a sound body" was no idle phrase of the ancient Greeks. Through their eyes the race at last caught a glimpse of a nobler order of civilization.

We must say further for the credit of the workers of Athens that Pericles had to get their vote before he could empty their treasury to finance these works of art, and when we reflect that the finest of the buildings do honour to Zeus and Athene, the supreme god and the particular patroness of their city, we are not surprised that they agreed and took pride in the beauty. Otherwise, we must admit, they were the weakness of Athens, and their ignorance was one of the main causes of its ruin. We might call it one of the chief defects of Athens that it never attempted to educate its people, if any nation had ever before done this and Athens had failed to follow.

But the idea had not yet occurred to any. It was reserved for the Romans.

So the Athenians, and the Greeks generally, in winning democracy had won only a half-victory. They had not conquered—not even realized—their own shortcomings. Aristophanes could make them roar with contempt of men of culture and of the aspirations of their women, and froth at the lips with zeal for the sorry gods and goddesses of Olympus. They expelled the sage Anaxagoras, with the alternative of death, for questioning their legends; they put Socrates to death on a gross and fictitious charge which probably concealed their hatred of his friendship with the rich and cultured; they left great teachers like Plato and Aristotle and Epicurus with a mere handful of pupils. The workers were more obtuse and more mischievous at Athens than in dozens of colonial cities which listened in crowds to the philosophers and made them their civic leaders. A stroll along a street of Athens to-day lets you see them as they were 2,000 years ago: the ugly house-fronts in the dirty, narrow streets, the open, unglazed windows looking into the dark, squalid, cavernous shops or workshops, and the ignorant workers babbling idly on politics and religion. . . . “Don’t let anybody hear you,” a merchant said quite seriously to me in Athens when I told him that I did not believe in gods. We might have been in the Athens of Aristophanes.

It was therefore still the minority which gave shape to the wealth which the workers created; and a hundred words that still circulate in our daily speech, like coins from the ancient Greek treasury—theatre, drama, tragedy, comedy, democracy, philosophy, logic, ethics, mathematics, Olympic Games, athletics, gymnastics, music, stoic, epicurean, geography, æsthetics, physics, metaphysics, etc.—remind us what we owe to them. The Greek “genius for art” is another phrase of the last

century which we must abandon. They were as novel and successful in creating higher political forms, systems of philosophy and science, healthy and beautiful bodies, history, and geography, and an incomparably higher type of literature, as they were in devising new styles of architecture and carving marble.

But, you may be tempted to exclaim, this is surely genius! Remember that behind the creativeness of Athens are those two centuries of colonial and cosmopolitan toil in the sunny workshop of the eastern Mediterranean and southern Italy which are so often forgotten. I made an inquiry how many of the men of genius who made Athens great were Athenians, but the records are too imperfect. The architects of the Parthenon, Ictinus and Callicrates, are of unknown extraction, but at least Euripides, Herodotus, Aristotle, Epicurus, Zeno, Aspasia, Hippocrates, and Heracleitus were not Athenian born. The wealth and the civic ambition of Athens had drawn men of ability from every part of the Greek world, and the number might have been greater but for the grave charges to which the bigotry of the Athenian democracy always exposed them.

It was owing to this bigotry that, while the Greek race proved itself just as capable of intellectual as of artistic achievements, Socrates, who was put to death, was the only outstanding thinker to live at Athens during the Golden Age. Plato and Aristotle taught in the next century, and even then were heeded by few of the Athenians. Their repute in modern literature is out of all proportion to their influence in Athens. Zeno and Epicurus, who had a far larger number of followers and an immeasurably greater influence upon Greek-Roman life during the next few centuries, came still later, in the days of decay. We have not, therefore, here to consider systems of philosophy or any development of the scientific ideas which had appeared in Ionia. The atmo-

sphere was poisonous to independent thought. It is even said that one of the charges on which the people sought the life of Anaxagoras was that he declared the stars to be, not immortal fires in a fixed sky but white-hot masses of stone or metal in the abysses of space. The contemporary leaders of the Ionian School developed their ideas in the provincial cities. The cultured few at Athens held their discussions in quiet gardens or in the inner courts and chambers of their houses, in frequent dread of an indictment for impiety.

And here we have the answer to the question of the relation of religion to the Golden Age of Athens. There was no relation. The illiterate people were fanatically religious; and they had no share in the great achievements which the historian records. The creative few were very largely sceptical. Anaxagoras had, as I said, to fly for his life, and the next most brilliant thinker of the time in Athens, Protagoras, was banished. Aspasia was put on trial for disbelief in the gods. Socrates was compelled to execute himself. Pheidias, an Athenian born and the greatest genius of his age, the artist who raised such monuments to the gods as no other man ever did, was bitterly persecuted by the priests and, if he was not, as one legend runs, poisoned, he died of a broken heart in exile. The entire class of creative thinkers and artists was under suspicion. Pericles was prudent, taking his part in the religious ceremonies, but his greatest speech, which is given at length in Thucydides (Bk. II), is significantly silent about either gods or God, though one would expect religious allusions in a funeral oration.

Historians have always acknowledged the general scepticism of the creative group at Athens. "Even the ordinary man in fifth-century Athens," says Mr. E. Bevan in his *Stoics and Sceptics*, "became aware that clever people no longer believed in his old gods." But

their scepticism went deeper than the Olympian fables. The Rev. Prof. Mahaffy speaks in his *Social Life in Greece* (p. 360) of the spread of "absolute freedom of thought, or scepticism" and says that "all historians of Greece" agree. Indeed, the Greek historian Thucydides goes beyond them all and relates (*History of the Peloponnesian War*, II, 53) that there was a wide spread of Atheism in Athens and the whole of Greece about the year 420.

More interesting is the question of Athenian morals. Since we are here concerned only with the impulses which were in the minds of the men who were responsible for the Golden Age, and it is acknowledged that Pericles and his friends were men of higher character, we need not linger over the point, but a study of Athens without some discussion of its sexual behaviour will seem to most readers very incomplete.

In view of the vast amount of censorious, almost tearful, literature on the subject, it is singular that the only clergyman who has a recognized authority on ancient Greece, Prof. Mahaffy—we shall scarcely be expected to count Dr. Jowett as a clergyman—says in one of the most learned studies of the subject that "the Athenian was the most refined and most brilliant civilization the world has yet seen," and shows that the comedies of Aristophanes, which his brother-clergymen (very few of whom have ever read them) regard as proof of Athenian depravity, must not be taken in that sense. He insists that "such immorality as that of the modern French stage was never tolerated among the Greeks." One may wonder what the reverend gentleman knew about the performances at the Moulin Rouge or the Folies Bergère, but he assuredly did know Greek literature.

Let us be careful to get two points clear. The first is that the preacher who still refers, with lowered voice, to "the nameless vices of the Greeks and Romans" rarely

knows anything about such practices. They are extraordinarily, blatantly common in modern Athens (and Greece and Southern Europe generally), whereas it is the common opinion of our modern authorities that they did not occur abnormally in the ancient city. As Mr. Edward Carpenter pointed out in his *Iolaus* (1902), Greek sentiment has been grossly misrepresented. Daily exercise, nude, in that sunny climate gave Greek boys and youths a wonderful physique and it attracted much admiration; besides that, as we read in Plato, who generally means love of men, not women, when he speaks of love, the warm and intimate friendship of men was esteemed higher than a sensuous attraction to women. It is significant that Michael Angelo considered a perfect male form more beautiful than even a Phryne.

On the other hand, the Greek ethic—indeed the ethical standard of all the old civilizations—did not require continence in the unmarried man, and there was therefore a considerable growth of the various classes of professional women, from the flute-players who entertained at rich banquets to the drabs of the dark places. Doubtless Athens had its “purple-lined palaces of sweet sin,” as Keats says of Corinth, but Plutarch, referring to these in his life of Alcibiades, insists that they were distasteful to the majority of men of the educated class; and Athens had not a body of such rich men as later appeared at Rome, to say nothing of the far richer men of a modern civilization. The *hetairai* who attended the more sober gatherings must, as I said, not be included among courtesans. In the later Greek world the name was used more loosely, and censors usually take their material, at second hand, from a work of Athenæus, *The Deipnosophists*. It is one of the most picturesque and exhaustive accounts of morals and customs that was ever written, but the author lived six or seven centuries after the time of Pericles, and he seems to have been quite in-

different whether the reports he collected were true or untrue. His account of the *hetairai* is therefore not applicable to the Ionian and Athenian ladies. That they were all chaste it would be ridiculous to expect; but many were teachers of repute or became extra-legal wives of distinguished Athenians. Plato, Socrates, and other philosophers were very friendly with them.

We must, however, not pass to the opposite extreme and make them, as some feminist writers do, correspond to the spinster-teachers of our modern colleges. The Greek ethic was social, not mystic. The Greek word which we translate "virtue" really means "excellence." A law had to have an intellectual or social sanction. Even Aristotle, who founded the science of ethics, had a mistress, Herpyllis, to whom he was warmly attached; and Zeno, the founder of Stoicism, had, according to Diogenes Laertius in his *Lives of the Philosophers*, no repugnance on moral grounds to free sexual conduct. Xenophon (*Banquet*, IV, 38) says the same about Socrates. If the principles I stated above are kept in view it is possible to reconcile the strangely contradictory verdicts of even high authorities on Greek morals. When Prof. Mahaffy says that "if one of us were transported to Periclean Athens, provided he were a man of high culture, he would find life and manners strangely like our own," we must make some reserve in regard to general character. Slavery was, except in the mines, where the interests of Greek capitalists ruled, mild and humane, and several of the Epicurean philosophers condemned the institution; and, if the position of the woman of the educated class was inferior to that which she had enjoyed in Egypt and Babylonia, we must remember that the movement for women's emancipation began in Athens. Plato and Euripides gave it their weighty support.

War—a long war with Sparta which caused a moral

as well as economic confusion—put an end to the Golden Age. Pericles died, and the group of men who had gathered round him was scattered. But Athens had developed such vitality of art and intellect that new artists of princely distinction arose, and Plato and Aristotle succeeded Socrates. The light flamed over the whole Greek world before it was dimmed in Athens. The Golden Age of Egypt or of Babylon had left the surrounding world dark when it vanished. The Golden Ages of Greece made all civilization richer.

W. K. Khan.

CHAPTER V

ALEXANDRIA UNDER THE PTOLEMIES

WE have a mean estimate of the debt of civilization to the Greeks if we think only of the achievements of Athens. That city was, it is true, the flower of Greek culture, but the garden in which it flourished had covered a broader space of the earth's surface than—if we cut off ragged imperial fringes—any of the older empires. Not only the sea-front of Asia Minor and the islands of the Ægæan but Sicily and the south of Italy also had rich and beautiful cities, founded by migrant Greeks, with the same stately temples and public buildings of white marble, the same passion for beauty and health of mind and body, and an even greater independence of spirit. Aristotle was born and his genius was developed in a coastal city of what the Athenians regarded as the far north. Archimedes made his famous discovery in a Sicilian city, Syracuse, which at one time rivalled Athens. The "Venus of Milo," the statue of Aphrodite which was found cast away in a cave on the island of Melos, was carved by an unknown provincial sculptor when Athens was in decay. The new ideal of the race, the cultivation of all the finer resources of the personal and collective life, spread from Syria to Naples; and presently it would captivate a more vigorous race, the Romans, who would disseminate it from Britain to Persia, from Germany to the Sahara.

Since India and China also rose in this period to the height of Golden Ages, it looked as if civilized man had, after three millennia of stumbling, entered the path which would lead him to the conquest of the earth. But his education was not yet complete. Between the

Athenian and these later Golden Ages the amazing portent of Alexander the Great was to burst into history, and one of the consequences of what seemed at first to be the destructive tramp of a burly giant across the globe was the development, at Alexandria, of a new civilization which added to the Greek ideal of life such pursuit of science and learning that it must have a place in this survey of the milestones of the race.

The Greek States, weakened by their quarrels and wars, fell under the rule of Philip of Macedon. But Philip counted himself and his people Greeks, and he very sincerely desired to maintain that supremacy in culture which they had won. He gave his strange genius of a son, Alexander, that other genius, Aristotle, as a tutor, and through all his campaigns and orgies Alexander kept the memory of his lessons. Standing on the desolate sea-shore of Egypt, which the Pharaohs had neglected, with the Greek world oversea behind him and the somnolent but still venerable cities of the old empire before him up the river, he had a Napoleonic vision. On this waste land between two worlds there should arise a great city of light and learning which should be trammelled in its life neither by the priests and demagogues of Athens nor the old men of Egypt. The lines of the city were traced, and Alexander continued his phenomenal march; and when he died prematurely this portion of his empire fell to that one of his generals, Ptolemy, who was most loyal to the cultural dream of Philip and Alexander. He was probably Philip's son.

Since here we have a Golden Age conjured out of a mud-flat in the course of two or three decades, we should like to know a little about this man who laid the foundations of it. In person he was a fierce-eyed, eagle-beaked soldier, of great energy and no particular morals. He had three wives, one of whom—the wisest, fairest, and most virtuous according to Plutarch—was his half-

sister, and a harem which included the famous beauty Thais. But once the fighting days were over he proved a sagacious and unselfish ruler.

It is said of him that he declared that he would rather see his people rich than be rich himself. Mahaffy says that he knew nothing and cared less about learning. It is strange, if that is true, that he was the first prince to endow scholarship, and that he founded the most famous centre of learning in the world. We may grant that the old soldier had little culture. A story that floated through Greek literature tells that he one day asked Euclid, the great geometrician, whom he had attracted with other scholars to Alexandria, whether his geometry could be made easy for the inexpert. "In geometry there is no special path for kings," Euclid replied. Ptolemy resigned himself to planning and endowing the richest home of learning the world had yet seen or would see for long ages to come, the Museum ("Home of the Muses"), and the greatest library of that book-collecting age.

When he abdicated, and his son Ptolemy II came to the throne of Egypt (285 B.C.), the Golden Age was, one might say, inevitable. Never before had there been such a promising coronation; and we know it almost as well as the coronation of George VI. From morn to dusk of a mild November day a stupendous procession paraded broad, marble-lined avenues on the site of the old waste. Fourteen lions led a train of panthers, leopards, lynxes, and a rhinoceros. Nubian slaves carried 600 tusks of ivory, 2,000 blocks of ebony, and gold and silver vessels filled with gold dust. A large gold-and-ivory statue of Dionysos rode in a chariot at the head of a vintage-pageant which included twenty-four chariots containing gaily-dressed Hindu ladies and drawn by elephants, and eighty chariots drawn by Asiatic antelopes, goats, and wild asses. Hundreds of slaves carried strange birds in

cages or on boughs of trees, and trays of perfumes and spices, or led thousands of Indian dogs on the leash. Statues of gods and kings rode in chariots of ivory and gold. In the royal box were a dozen of the Greek world's most famous scholars and poets; and doubtless they sat at the close in the specially built banquet hall, with marble columns shaped like palms, the choicest paintings in the world, hangings of Egyptian scarlet and Phœnician purple, and large gold vessels studded with diamonds and rubies. The coronation cost, it is said, £600,000; and the gold crowns presented to the young king and queen by the cities of the world were worth more than that in value.

Perhaps it was wrong to say that a new Golden Age was inevitable. It had begun. For this was no mere splash of half-barbaric splendour or ostentation of wealth such as even a rough soldier and conqueror might indulge. The young prince—he was then twenty-four years old—was no robust soldier and had no barbaric tastes. His mother Berenice, whose name lingers among the stars, was Plutarch's paragon of beauty, wisdom, and virtue, and she had had her son most carefully educated, and had encouraged him in his mild and courteous ways. He consorted with the learned men and superbly completed the home of science and literature which his father had begun. It is due to him above all others that the seeds of science which had germinated in Ionia and had been neglected in Athens now found a fertile soil and advanced more in 200 years of Alexandrian life than they would in the next 1,500 years of European history.

Or let us say that it was due to him and his wife-sister Arsinoe. From what I said about his father we are prepared to learn that a large brood of children and mothers hungrily contemplated the crown; and Ptolemy, son of the third wife, was not—though there was yet no law or custom of succession in the new kingdom—the

obvious heir. To make the story short, there was when the father died, two years after the coronation, a dark and dangerous conspiracy, and heads fell. Then the young king, finding himself with an irritating consort as the result of a political marriage, divorced her and married his sister.

Arsinoe was a young widow who had returned to live at her brother's court and had, unlike his wife, taken a deep interest in his enterprises. She was a woman of manly beauty—of the Athene rather than the Aphrodite type—and intelligence, an equal partner in the royal work, a ruthless politician in a world that held much treachery. From the fact that she had no children we may perhaps infer that the mutual attachment was more mental than sensual; and we will not forget that kings of Egypt had for ages married their sisters when they desired. Arsinoe seems to have been throughout life completely indifferent to the “magnificent sensuality”—to use a phrase of D'Annunzio's—of her husband. His palace was an imperial harem, with all the windows wide open, and it attracted ladies of artistic skill or great beauty from all parts of the world as readily as it drew scholars and artists. Statues of the choicer ladies adorned the public squares.

If we would understand this extraordinary world of flaunting sensuality, seething vitality, and superb achievement over which Ptolemy Philadelphus—which does not mean, as some imagine, that he proclaimed himself “the lover of men” but the lover of his sister—presided, we must remember that it was in a very literal sense a new world. In this city which had been charmed out of a wilderness the Greek did not meet Phoenician and Lydian, as he had done in Ionia. He did not even meet the Egyptians, for, although Ptolemy ruled over Egypt (as well as Phoenicia, Palestine, and some of the islands), he and his successors regarded it rather as a tribute-yielding

province and left it to their provincial governors. The persistence with which artists and literary men present Cleopatra, the last of the dynasty, as an Egyptian is not less foolish than the way in which they depict her as an ignorant and thoughtless sensualist. There never was a purer-blooded dynasty—of Macedonian (or Greek) blood—because many of the monarchs married their sisters. In this they may have lightly referred to the Egyptian royal tradition, but they had created a world of their own, between the Greek and the Egyptian and independent of the traditions of either in vital matters.

Thus Ptolemy II, with his brilliant and completely licentious court, was not a weakling who, having inherited a royal fortune, set out to dissipate it, but a clear-headed man with a deliberate philosophy of life and an ideally suitable consort. He paid equal attention to his personal pleasure, the development and administration of his kingdom, and the protection and encouragement of learning. He spent as lavishly upon the great Library and Colleges, the Lighthouse (Pharos) which counted as one of the Seven Wonders of the World, and the adornment of the city as upon his luxurious court. He probably had no religion; yet he built scores of beautiful temples. He re-cut the old canal from the Nile to the Red Sea and opened trade with India—which, we shall see, had been awakened from its long slumber. He cleared Upper Egypt of bandits and made roads for trade with Nubia and Ethiopia. He restored the economic life of Egypt and made it remarkably prosperous. Some historians think that they pay him a compliment and recognize the splendour of the Golden Age he created by comparing him to Louis XIV. The comparison is absurdly flattering to Louis XIV.

The city of Alexandria, in the first place, was almost the most marvellous civic growth in history. We might compare the founding of Constantinople in the fourth

century A.D., but Constantine had used the resources of the entire Roman Empire. The first two Ptolemies, taking over a very dilapidated section of Alexander's empire, had erected upon a mud-flat a city which was second only to Athens in the beauty of its public monuments and was in some respects far superior to Athens. "Other cities are but villages compared to it," says a contemporary Greek writer. Prof. Pridik, the chief authority on it to-day, declares that it was the most beautiful city of its age; and in the sense that beauty was more widely spread, not concentrated in a few buildings, he is probably right, though it was an age of beautiful cities. It soon became "the most wealthy and most splendid city of the known world," says another authority.

The site chosen by Alexander was a strip of land, about five or six miles in length and two in depth, between the Mediterranean and the large Lake Mareotis. A few miles offshore sprawled the island of Pharos, forming a large harbour on each side of the mole. On the eastern tip of the island he projected, and Ptolemy II finished on a princely scale, a lighthouse which counted, as I said, among the Seven Wonders of the World. It was no bald tower of stone tapering slightly to the summit, but a very elegant structure in white marble with a broad and artistic quadrangular lower part. You get some idea of it if you imagine the Eiffel Tower in white marble. Ancient writers claim that it had a height of about 400 feet and cost, in the coinage of the time, about £170,000. Its light, doubtless backed by reflecting mirrors, could be seen thirty miles out at sea.

That was the scale on which Ptolemy II built the city which his father had begun. Its walls were about fifteen miles in circumference, and in its foundations, under the streets and houses, were vast cisterns which held a year's supply of fresh water for the entire population; and this

must have risen to more than 250,000 before Ptolemy died. What chiefly intrigued the visitor, whether from Europe or Asia, was that the city was laid out with perfect regularity, like a modern American city, the streets running straight from north to south or east to west.

One street (Canobic Street) ran the full length of the city from east to west, a distance of five or six miles, and it is almost incredibly stated by contemporary travellers to have been 200 feet wide. We may assume that it was at all events more than 100 feet wide, and it was lined on each side with a graceful marble colonnade. It was lit by lamps at night, and we may be sure that there were thousands of stately palms and that some of the finest houses of the citizens were ranged behind the colonnades. A second street, of the same width and beauty, intersected it and ran from north to south. Even the secondary streets were broad enough for the passage of horses and chariots. In this bold defiance of the oriental sun, from which men had hitherto shrunk into narrow, tortuous streets, we see something of the character of the two Ptolemies. The glare was, in fact, such, owing to the abundance of white marble and polished granite, that veils and curtains of green silk were seen everywhere, tempering the blaze to the eyes.

Near the intersecting point of the two magnificent, paved avenues was the superb tomb of Alexander, whose body the elder Ptolemy had seized from a rival and enclosed in a golden coffin; and near this the second Ptolemy had raised a rich memorial to his parents. But of the gardens, groves, and innumerable marble statues which he lavished upon the city we need not speak. Centuries later an uncouth Arab commander would take over the city, and he would write in astonishment to the Caliph that he had seized a city which contained 400 palaces, 400 theatres, and 4,000 public baths. We know the Arab fondness for round numbers, but even before the

death of Ptolemy II the city was rich with parks, baths, gymnasia, and theatres, besides a large sports ground (Stadium) and a horse-racing ground. Ptolemy's wealth became fabulous. It is said that he drew more than £5,000,000 a year from Egypt alone, and that, in spite of his prodigious expenditure and the maintenance of an army of 250,000 infantry and cavalry and a fleet of 1,500 ships—some of them running to thousands of tons—he left more than £200,000,000 in the treasury when he died. Money, we must remember, had then many times the value it has to-day.

The royal palace, on the sea-front, has unfortunately to be left to our imaginations, and we have vaguely to conceive the use by almost limitless wealth and a resolute sensuality of all the artistic resources of Greece, Syria, and Egypt. Apelles, who is believed to have been the greatest painter of the ancient world, was one of the artists who were attracted to Alexandria. Near the palace was the Home of the Muses—the original meaning of "Museum"—which had begun to rise in the later years of the old king. It was, in fact, the first university in the world, except that Ptolemy did not compel the scholars and artists to pay for their maintenance by teaching. It assumed the character of a school later. In Ptolemy's conception it was a princely shelter in which scholars, poets, and artists of leading distinction from all parts of the world should pursue their work without care about material things or the prejudices of priests and ignorant democracies. Not that in those days Alexandria alone honoured the Greek philosophers and writers. In many a city a distinguished exponent of philosophy received a salary, a statue, or a civic honour, so that Ptolemy had sometimes to bid high for a scholar he wanted. One city is said to have retained its philosopher by paying him £4,000 a year. In those days philosophers talked about the realities of life.

Ptolemy could offer such opportunities for research and such comfort that his colony of scholars and artists ought to have been counted one of the Seven Wonders of the World. Learning was organized and subdivided, but the masters met under the palms of the broad promenade in their garden or in the large common dining-room, where poets and philosophers, artists and historians, and the men who were laying the foundations of our modern science compared their views. In the cluster of buildings physiologists and medical students had opportunities for dissecting monkeys and even bodies of criminals, astronomers were provided with the best of such instruments as had at that time been invented, and all had the advantage of a remarkably complete library. At great cost Ptolemy sent agents through the Greek world to buy copies of every available book on every subject, from poetry to metaphysics, and before he died 400,000 separate volumes were offered to his scholar-guests. Some writers speak of 700,000 volumes, and it is not unlikely that later Ptolemies, with all their faults, raised the contents of the library to that figure.

We will not forget that a "volume" meant a strip of hand-written parchment rolled upon a rod, and doubtless many were small—"A big book is a big evil," said one of Ptolemy's most learned guests (who, by the way, wrote eight hundred himself)—or were multiple copies of the same work. The library was nonetheless a new and significant event in the history of civilization, and it set an example which scores of Greek, and presently Roman, cities followed. The sages of the Museum added industriously to the total, for the days had come when many a scholar wrote from 100 to 300 "volumes." A second library, at the extreme south-west of the city, had to be opened, and this in turn housed about 50,000 volumes. If we reflect that more than 1,000 years later no library in Europe, except in Arab Spain, had as many as

10,000 volumes, we appreciate one reason why we must certainly grant a gold medal to the Alexandria of Ptolemy II.

The second library calls our attention to another unique feature of the new civilization. The Ptolemies were as independent of the religious traditions of Greece and Egypt as they were of all other traditions, but they were too prudent to impose upon the mass of the people the scepticism which they discussed with the philosophers of the Museum. The favourite among these of Ptolemy II was the recognized Atheist Theodorus, who had been one of his tutors; but we will return to this point later. Whether or not Ptolemy, among whose great cultural works was the financing of the first complete history of Egypt (if not also—this is disputed—the first Greek or Septuagint translation of the Old Testament), had learned of the terrible cost of Amenhotep IV's attempt to suppress the popular cults, he at all events never interfered with them. He built or endowed both Greek and Egyptian temples. But he presented the city with a remarkable alternative upon which all who saw the childishness of the older mythologies yet would not accept the scepticism of the philosophers could unite. He imported a new god, Serapis, from the north of Asia Minor, and invested him with all the spiritual and ethical attributes which the reform of religion demanded.

The western extremity of the city, which was, as I said, in the form of a parallelogram, was left to the Egyptians, who took up residence in large numbers. In the southern part of this Ptolemy built the famous Serapeum, or temple and city of Serapis, to which he attached the new library. Serapis was adopted as an Egyptian god, and his priests formed colleges or communities of severely ascetic life; which may have amused King Ptolemy. He, however, completed for them, on his usual princely scale, the remarkable foundation which his father

had begun. A magnificent temple was built on a high artificial mound from which one could survey the entire city, and the royal army of artists were set to work upon its marble colonnades and beautifully decorated halls. There are ancient writers who protest that the Serapeum of Alexandria ought to be counted one of the Seven Wonders of the World, but the whole city was to Greek travellers a collection of wonders.

Of all the magnificent structures of the city not a stone is left upon a stone, and the priceless collection of ancient books, after suffering in the war with the Romans and being restored (from other libraries) by the Romans, perished in the appalling holocaust of art and literature which marked the triumph of fanaticism in the last years of the Roman Empire. The mediæval story that when the Arabs reached Egypt in the seventh century they still found books enough to feed the furnaces of the public baths is a monkish invention which appeared only several centuries after the Arab invasion.

There was, however, one monument of the Ptolemies, the result of the pursuit of science, which fanaticism might confine in the vaults of Europe for 1,000 years but could not destroy. The purely literary work of the Alexandrians we may not miss, though some of the historical works, like the great history of Egypt, would to-day be of high value. The loss of the philosophical works also may leave us dry-eyed. A century ago the world of learning thought of Alexandria chiefly as the cradle of what it called the Neo-Platonist philosophy. Since no one to-day (except, perhaps, Dr. Inge) appreciates this adulteration of Plato with Asiatic mysticism we need not linger over it; though it may amuse us to reflect in passing that this most spiritual of ancient philosophers was born in one of the most sensual of cities, the city so elegantly described in Pierre Louys's novel *Aphrodite*. But the scientific work accomplished in the halls and chambers of the Museum is a

ground for awarding the title Golden Age such as we find in no other period of history until our own time.

Ionian science, important as it was in inaugurating that direct study of Nature which has proved so valuable to the race, had been mainly a matter of speculation on the broad happenings of Nature. Socrates and Plato had disdained such study, but Aristotle and the followers of the Ionian school who were scattered over the colonial world had carried it a few steps farther. In particular Hippocrates had opened a new era in declaring that all disease was a natural process, and others had developed the elements of mathematics which practical requirements had inspired in Egypt and Babylon. In Alexandria, especially in the third and second centuries B.C., scientific method was created and scientific truth greatly enlarged.

Euclid, whom Ptolemy I had drawn from Greece, wrote many works on mathematics besides the manual of geometry which was until recent years as familiar in our schools as in those of Greece. He was a creative genius and a man of fine personality. "Give him three-pence, since he wants money for his work," he said to a slave when someone asked what profit he would make by his studies. Archimedes, the famous inventor, was one of his pupils at the Museum, and applied his principles to mechanical science, of which there was a special school at Alexandria. One man, Hero, got as far as the construction of a model steam-engine, in which jets of steam made a sort of turbine revolve. Others applied mathematical principles to optics, or to the nature of light and vision.

Most successful of all was the application to astronomy. Aristarchus discovered that the planets revolved round the sun and the earth rotated on its axis; and it is amusing to learn that the leader of the more religious Stoics of the time wanted him prosecuted for daring to say that the sun was not the fixed centre of the universe. Aristarchus made a remarkable estimate also of the distance and

diameter of the moon, and said that the sun must be eighteen to twenty times farther away than the moon. It is, of course, considerably more distant, though the statement of Aristarchus was very bold for his age; but trigonometry had not yet been invented. This was done by Hipparchus, another man who was as fine in personality as he was great in genius, and astronomy continued to advance. Geography made the same progress, the great Eratosthenes not only compiling the first scientific manual but also computing that the earth is a globe with a circumference of 28,000 miles. Anatomy, medicine, natural history, and botany made almost equal progress. The permission to dissect led to great progress in knowledge of the body, and the costly collections (even from Ethiopia and India) of new animals and plants promoted biological science and enriched the pharmacopœia.

The Ptolemies—the later Ptolemies, for all their vices, continued to subsidize the work—procured and facilitated the work of these men of science and put the race on the path of inquiry which has proved of supreme value in our age. If we apply our severest tests before we speak of a Golden Age, we must conclude that Alexandria in the third century B.C. deserves that title more than any other; but we may recall that it was distinguished also in art, literature, and general character. Prof. Mahaffy, who was not likely to overlook its defects, says in his *Empire of the Ptolemies* that the scanty records show “an orderly and well-managed society, where there is but little actual want and little lawlessness.” Some of the later kings were guilty of revolting acts, but these do not affect our general estimate of the new civilization. We have, in fact, to reflect, in view of the sociological value that is claimed for the anti-sensual type of character, that this civilization not only endured but continued to protect a fruitful scholarship for three centuries—we might say, indeed, until Hypatia was murdered and the colleges burned by

the monks four centuries later still—although every monarch was sexually licentious and some were extremely cruel and selfish.

It is hardly necessary to add that none of them were religious. We saw this in regard to the first two Ptolemies, and we need not glance at their less respectable successors. Of the statesmen and administrators who carried out their plans we know nothing, but in a city where an idol was brought from a semi-barbarous region to supersede the traditional cults, the atmosphere of the educated world was necessarily sceptical. Few of the great men of the Museum are known to have admitted any kind of mysticism, and the great majority of those whose opinions can be traced followed the prevailing philosophy of their time. This went by the name of Scepticism and was fairly equivalent to what Huxley called Agnosticism. The leading followers of Aristotle in the third century, to say nothing of the followers of Zeno and Epicurus, had reached this conclusion as regards the belief in gods. But we return to this point when we consider the Golden Age of Rome. That of Alexandria was based upon wealth, cultural contact with half a dozen older civilizations, a remarkable development of shipping, and the appearance of two powerful monarchs who took pride in the advancement of art and learning and the adornment and healthiness of their capital city.

CHAPTER VI

INDIA IN THE DAYS OF ASOKA

PTOLEMY II was still on the throne of Egypt when there acceded to the throne of India a prince whose name is as deeply honoured in the annals of virtue as that of Ptolemy is deprecated; yet both the sybarite and the saint, the sceptical and voluptuous Greek and the royal Buddhist monk, lifted their respective kingdoms to the level of a Golden Age. No historian will dispute that we must select the reign of Asoka as the most splendid chapter in 5,000 years of Hindu history. We may not care to endorse the claim which Mr. H. G. Wells makes in his *Outline of History*, that "amidst the tens of thousands of monarchs that crowd the columns of history the name of Asoka shines, and shines almost alone, a star," but when we survey the broad advance of the race in the last six centuries of the old era we do see Asoka's empire, as well as Athens and Alexandria, on the crest of the wave.

Which was the greater civilization, that of the saint or that of the sinner? I doubt if any historian would hesitate to cast his vote in favour of the kingdom of the Ptolemies. The reader will soon be able to judge. But we may at once resolve the painful dilemma of the moralist by observing that he has, as usual, been misinformed about the facts. There is no evidence that Asoka, although a monk, cherished the puritanism which Ptolemy so conspicuously lacked, while the Alexandrian Greek would have cordially agreed with the Hindu in esteeming it the supreme virtue of a monarch to promote the peace, prosperity, and happiness of his subjects.

It was quite time, in the third century B.C., that India

reached the higher level of civilization. Until a few decades ago it was believed that the country learned the ways of civilized man from an Aryan people who, separating from their Persian cousins in the region of the Caucasus, crossed what is now Baluchistan about 1000 B.C. and entered north-west India by the mountain passes. In the *Veda* we still have the robust and instinctively poetic chants in which they called upon their fierce gods and boasted of their victories, and we politely wonder why the scholars of the last century called them civilized. Early in this century representatives of the new Hindu scholarship detected in their ancient literature traces of a civilization which had flourished in their country long before the barbaric Aryans drove their cattle over the mountains and poured upon the plains. European scholars smiled, but archaeological research has fully vindicated the Hindus.

Along the course of the Indus for several hundred miles we have found the ruins of large cities, and these show that before 3000 B.C. a civilization as advanced as those of Egypt and Mesopotamia spread over the valley. Many objects found in the ruins prove, in fact, that these cities were in communication across the Indian Ocean with the Mesopotamians. They were the eastern wing of the denser population which, in the New Stone Age, occupied the sheltered and fertile strip of earth from Crete to India. I explained how this was a fateful sequel of the Ice Age. Five thousand years ago these early inhabitants of India built large and well-organized cities, with temples and public buildings, drained streets, and baths. Their women wore elegant woven garments, bound their hair with gold ribbon, and had necklaces of gold beads, silver bangles and buckles, and small toilet sets. Their pottery was very fine, and they wrought excellent art in gold, silver, and copper. It seems that they traded even with China. In short, they were fully civilized at the same early period as Ur in Mesopotamia.

This is not a history of human development; but it is necessary to know that when Asoka's grandfather created the first Empire of India he found a very ancient culture in the land waiting for re-animation. And just as this high culture had begun at a time when the Hindus were in contact with the peoples of the west, and the restoration of it coincides with and was due to the renewal of contact with the west—the coming of the Babylonians, Greeks, and Persians—so the long intervening stagnation of India is explained by its isolation. We have no history of those 2,000 years of decay, and the Aryans, when they came, played the same destructive part as the Mitanni in Syria, the early Greeks in the *Æ*gean region, and the Goths in Rome. Our Aryan race has a superb record of vandalism.

It is often suggested that the Greeks who accompanied Alexander the Great in India (327–324 B.C.), or remained to guard his work, restore our credit to some extent because it was they who stimulated the Hindus. Greek influence helped, but it was the Chaldaean merchants of the days of Nebuchadrezzar who had, long before this, renewed the vital contact with India, and the Persians had maintained the traffic when they conquered Babylon. It was on the plea that he had won the Persian Empire that Alexander had gone so far east.

The Greek writers who now begin to give us our first pictures of Hindu life tell us of a number of principalities and kingdoms with which Alexander entered into conflict or negotiation. Chief of these was the kingdom of Magadha, on the Ganges, and one day there came to Alexander's camp a prince of this realm, one Chandragupta, who urged Alexander to attack it. The reigning king, it seemed, was the son of a barber who, becoming the lover of the queen, had slain the king and usurped the throne, but he was hated for his vulgar vices. When Alexander turned west once more, Chandragupta himself took the field, seized Magadha, and added province after province

to his dominion until it became larger than the Empire of India is to-day.

Mr. Vincent Smith, who is probably our best authority on the subject, says in his *Early History of India* that Chandragupta was "one of the greatest and most successful kings known to history." One might, in fact, claim that Chandragupta was far more creative than his grandson Asoka, and that his reign, which lasted a quarter of a century, ought rather to be counted India's Golden Age. If we are tempted to lay undue stress on the contrast of their characters, we must remember that the head that wears a crown lies still more uneasy when it is the head of a usurper and conqueror. It is said that Chandragupta never slept on two successive nights in the same room of his palace. Certainly he created the wealthy kingdom, with its high art and skilful organization, which Asoka inherited, but the grandson mellowed it with an idealism which completes its title to the gold medal of the historian.

It is, however, the Empire, and particularly the capital city, of Chandragupta which the Greek officials—we have one Hindu work of about the same period—describe for us. About 500 miles from the mouth of the Ganges, at the point where the Son flows into it, there are to-day the native city of Palma and the British station of Bankipore. Underneath these is buried, as completely as ancient Alexandria is buried at the mouth of the Nile, the greatest city of Asia in the third century B.C., Pataliputra. Nine miles long and a mile and a half in depth, it was built on a tongue of land between the two rivers—they have since changed their courses—and was surrounded by a palisade of heavy timber, pierced by sixty-four gates and surmounted by 570 towers, and a broad moat.

The king's palace, says the Greek scribe who lived in the city, was more splendid than those of the kings of Persia, which had been counted the last word in royal extravagance. It was built mainly of timber, though it

contained some beautifully carved stone, and the ornamentation was very rich. We have a vision, under the fierce Indian sun, of columns entwined with vines which had leaves of gold and silver and stuffed specimens of brilliantly plumed birds. Chairs and tables, exquisitely carved, bore golden vessels, some of which were six feet in width, and copper vases studded with jewels. A park of great beauty surrounded the palace, and when the king crossed this to go to the hall of justice he sat in a golden palanquin with a canopy of fine muslin embroidered with purple and gold, its tassels shining with pearls. When he went farther afield to hunt, his horse or his elephant had trappings of gold. A kingdom that stretched from the Bay of Bengal to the Arabian Sea yielded in abundance "the sands of Indus and the adamant of Golconda."

More interesting is the life of the court and the people; and much of it was as strange to the Greek as the racing oxen which drew cars at the speed of horses. What impresses one most in his narrative, however, is his enthusiastic admiration of the efficiency of the administration and the character of the people. It is true that crime was repressed by ferocious penalties (amputation, etc.), but Megasthenes insists that the great body of the people had a high character. Here are a few of his appreciations:—

They have no law-suits about pledges or deposits, nor do they require either seals or witnesses, but they make their deposits and confide in each other. Their houses and property they generally leave unguarded. . . . Truth and virtue they hold alike in esteem. Hence they grant no special privileges to the aged unless they possess superior wisdom. They did not even use aliens as slaves, much less countrymen of their own.

We are rather reminded of myopic Lafcadio Hearn's

eulogies of the modern Japanese, but we are bound to conclude that, in spite of some exaggeration—he is, for instance, wrong about slavery—the Greek found the mass of the people of a better type than he had known in the west; and this, we must remember, was in the generation before Asoka.

This amiable disposition of the people was reflected in a remarkably complete and paternal organization of the State. There was a national bureau, with officials in all parts of the country, for every important social purpose. Indeed, these departments of State often rendered public services which were grossly neglected in Europe until modern times. Three hundred years ago you would have found the streets of London and Paris without paving or sewers or lamps at night, and you would have had to keep your eye alert for the refuse that was, in the narrow streets, flung from door or window. Streets were cleaner and better supervised in Chandragupta's capital 2,200 years ago. Temples, markets, roads, and bridges came under the public services. The wages and hours of labour of the workers were fixed by law. Irrigation was provided everywhere, and there was a forestry service. A special department attended to the interests of foreigners and, if one of these died and left property in India, sent it or its value to the man's relatives abroad. Chandragupta may have imposed heavy taxes, but he bore the expense of these immense and benevolent services, besides maintaining a standing army of 600,000 infantry and cavalry, 9,000 elephants, and 8,000 chariots.

It is piquant to notice that this admirable code of personal and public conduct hardly glanced at the sex-life of the people. Some day an historian will give us the fascinating story of the very different development of moral ideas amongst the Persians and the Hindus, who originally formed one family. To the Persians, who invented the dogma that the flesh had, like all things

material, been created by the devil, and that man would be sternly judged after death for yielding to its impulses, we owe the ascetic code which began to spread from their shaggy villages about 1,000 years before Christ. One is tempted to speculate upon the influence of environment on the growth of moral ideas. The Persians had settled on the bracing hills above Mesopotamia, where even Nature was temperate in her yield of the earth's fruits and seemed to respond to the embrace of the sun only in so far as the needs of men required, while the Hindus, and the Aryans who came across the mountains to join them, found themselves in a land of exuberant fertility. However that may be, the ancient Hindu civilization had a unique attitude towards the sex-life, and it remained the general attitude until, in the last century, the new Aryan came to frown upon its freedom.

The contemporary Hindu writer Chanikya has a remarkable chapter on "The Superintendence of Prostitutes." He refers chiefly to the royal prostitutes. This does not mean simply ladies of the harem, for it appears that the king drew a large revenue from women of this type and housed them in or about the palace. They were so numerous that it took eighty "fathers" and fifty "mothers" to supervise them. The poorer might work in the kitchens and store-rooms, but the more favoured, who dressed in the lovely and graceful muslins of the Hindu lady and wore rich jewellery, were honoured as peers of the realm would later be in Europe. They were the close personal attendants of the king, holding the royal umbrella and the fan when he sat on his throne and riding with him in the hunt. The profession was hereditary, the daughter of one being summoned at the age of eight to make music before the king; though the richer women might buy their freedom. They were kept apart from the general body of women of their class, though these also were protected by law and were in the lists of

the population associated with actors, musicians, dancers, thought-readers, hair-dressers, and makers of perfumes, all of whom were considered to follow quite respectable professions.

This ingenuous attitude was not a recent growth. Mr. S. C. Sarkar, a modern Hindu writer, shows in his *Some Aspects of the Earliest Social Life in India* (1928) that there had been the same freedom for ages. He says that relations of brother and sister were "normally recognized" and "free love-making between young men and women before marriage was fully recognized in ordinary society." At the most we may suppose that the organization of the State by Chandragupta gave official sanction to the general attitude. The women paid a special tax and had the protection of the law, besides seeing the highest representatives of their caste so deeply honoured.

It is important, in view of the familiar practice of connecting moral and religious ideas with the rise and fall of civilizations, to understand these features of life in India's Golden Age; still more important to note that Asoka did not disturb them. Asoka was about twenty-five years old when, in the year 274 B.C., he acceded to the throne. He spent five years in an obscure struggle with rivals and many further years in aggressive warfare. The Brahmans, whom he displaced when he adopted Buddhism late in life, accused him of killing ninety-four of his hundred brothers, but their pious libels are not heeded by historians. The first clear event in his life is that he felt a deep remorse after a battle in which, it is said, 100,000 men were slain and 100,000 severely wounded, and he became, if he had not previously joined the sect, a Buddhist. Thus during the first fifty years of his life he had enjoyed the customary pleasures of an Indian prince, and for the next twenty years he was a Buddhist. Some sort of initiation made him a Buddhist monk.

But those who interpret this to mean that at last we have a deeply religious man leading his people to the height of civilization share a popular illusion about Buddhism. Buddha had died two centuries earlier and had left no organized body of followers. It is true that there were many homes or monasteries in which disillusioned or mystic-minded men cultivated the rules of virtue which Buddha had taught; just as there were, even on the outskirts of Pataliputra, communities of Brahmins who renounced sensual pleasure and softness of couch and devoted their lives to religious discussion. Asoka, a man of practical and energetic character, preferred the comparatively simple code of the moderate Buddhists to the Brahmanic religion with its priestly order and the weird web of verbiage which the Greeks called its philosophy; and even from Buddhism he accepted only one dogma, reincarnation—which is not a vital part of the real teaching of Buddha—and one consequence of that dogma, vegetarianism.

In that land of abounding game the tables of the rich had been laden with the fruits of the hunt. Asoka forbade hunting and allowed no flesh except that of an occasional peacock—possibly he knew how insipid it is—to come to his table. We know that he did not disperse the royal wives and concubines, because in one of his Edicts he says that officers who have bad conduct to report may approach him even in the women's quarters. It is, in fact, said that in advanced age he married a young woman whose charm was distinctly more physical than moral, and by this act the royal monk opened the door to much of the evil which soon destroyed India's Golden Age. We are reminded of Marcus Aurelius sealing the doom of the Golden Age at Rome by leaving his power to entirely corrupt children.

In its main lines the code of life which Asoka imposed upon his people, and tried to impose upon the whole

world, by a unique campaign for righteousness, was just the simple standard of social conduct which is one of the conditions of the stability of a civilization. He had his moral exhortations or commands (Edicts) carved upon stone pillars, twenty to seventy feet in height, which he set up in all parts of his empire. Probably few of the people could read them, but the governors and officials were ordered to stamp them upon the minds of men and women everywhere and report any who were disloyal to them. They were, the Edicts run, to be very tolerant in regard to religious differences; to be truthful, honest, and kindly in their relations with each other; to give alms to the poor (which led to the appearance of swarms of beggars, fakirs, and begging monks); and to love animals and respect their lives. Asoka, like Buddha, was no moral "seer," as some claim. In the one respect in which he permitted mysticism to dictate his code—reincarnation—he went astray.

Whether he made his people more tolerant—Brahmanism had not hitherto been intolerant—truthful, peaceful, honest, and generous than they had been in the days of his grandfather we do not know. A Chinese visitor, Fa-hsien, gives us a very pleasant picture of the condition of the kingdom :—

Its people are rich and thriving, and they rival one another in practising kindness of heart and duty to one's neighbour.

But the Greek Megasthenes had said this in the days of Chandragupta. These qualities of behaviour cannot be measured accurately enough to enable us to compare the average character of the people in one age or country with character in other ages and countries. Certainly the incessant and universal spying and tale-bearing which Asoka eagerly encouraged—it is said that even prostitutes were enlisted to report if their clients were deficient

in virtue—would hardly sweeten the air of his moral garden, while the king's interference with the main food of tens of millions of his people, on the ground of a superstition he had borrowed from broody monks, almost lent a tinge of cruelty to his gospel of kindness. Fishing was forbidden, and one can imagine what privation this would mean in a land with so vast a coastline and so many and such mighty rivers. The farmers, too—and it was a land of fishers and farmers—resented the prohibition of branding and the restriction of the castration of superfluous male animals. The paths of virtue ought not thus to be strewn with thorns by the moralists.

Yet it is the general verdict of historians that in spite of these limitations Buddhism had, through the action of Asoka, a very beneficent influence upon the life of India and, in time, of all Asia. It was already two centuries since the death of Buddha, and, as he had not dreamed of founding a new religion or imagined that he had discovered a new truth, there had been no faithful record of his teaching. He had just given a plain rule of life to plain folk; he had, indeed, merely urged them to observe the rules which they well knew. But his message seems at times to have been couched in the philosophic language of the Sankhya School from which he had issued. It has become the fashion to say that Buddha, Mahavira (the founder of Jainism), Asoka, Kung-fu-tse, and Meng-tse, the greatest of Asia's teachers, preferred to speak to men in human language only, without referring to God or gods, but one wonders if any of these writers who are so reluctant to breathe the word Atheism could name a single distinguished moralist who believed in God yet entirely omitted him from his moral exhortations. Since Buddhism was not yet corrupt, we may assume that Asoka acted upon the pure humanitarianism of Buddha.

As long as he lived he seems to have kept within bounds

the tendency to ritual and dispute about Buddha's meaning among the tens of thousands who now embraced the royal cult. Even later, when Buddhism became a religion and in its flow over Asia absorbed weird adulterations of ritual and superstition, it preserved the moral element upon which Buddha and Asoka had insisted. No other religion in history has been so little tainted with intolerance, and it has for 2,000 years been an excellent influence in China, Burma, and (until its recent corrupt alliance with politicians and soldiers) Japan. It has had no inconsiderable influence upon Chinese and Japanese art. Even if Asoka had been the genius which some imagine, one may doubt if he could have foreseen the evils it would develop: its withdrawal of hundreds of thousands of men of high character from the duties of family, civic, national, and economic life and, in its debased form, the promotion of the growth of vast monasteries with the vices of those of later Europe.

Asoka did not confine his improvement of the State to a correction of individual conduct. He built a number of hospitals and had large gardens of medicinal herbs which he distributed to the poor. He reformed the prisons and, anticipating our advanced ideas on the subject, urged officials to help prisoners to see the blunder of crime rather than punish them. He recommended the education and kindly treatment of slaves and servants. He built hostels, dug wells, and planted trees along the roads for travellers. He opened "spinning-houses" (workshops) for widows and poor women and made provision for the aged. He had thousands of vessels of water placed on the streets of his capital to meet the contingency of fire, and he imposed a fine upon any man who would not help to extinguish a fire in his neighbour's house. He made it a penal offence to fling dead animals or filth upon the streets. He instituted a department of State to attend to the welfare of the backward

races in his Empire. And, above all, he denounced war and most ardently desired the friendly intercourse of all nations, sending his missionaries as far as Syria in the west to preach his gospel. His own people were his children, but all men were his brothers.

How very modern, you reflect! Yet a generation earlier Meng-tse had held up these ideals before the dazed and weary eyes of China, and the Epicureans and Stoics had urged them upon the Greeks and Alexandrians with admirable results. But Asoka was the most powerful monarch in the world, and he had the magnificent work of Chandragupta as his basis. The pacifist who denounces the soldier is too often like the elegant youth who deplores the lack of cultivation or refinement of the father who made his fortune, or the spendthrift who, as we saw in the case of Amenhotep IV, dissipates, however high his aim might be, the treasure bequeathed to him. In the imperfect stage of civilization which embraces all history to our time none love the pacifist so much as does the criminally aggressive prince. The dynasty of Chandragupta perished half a century after the death of Asoka, and with it perished the tarnished and debilitated polity which the India of the Golden Age had become. Once more, let us candidly note, a campaign on behalf of virtue marked, not the inauguration, but the decay, of a Golden Age. But let us not too narrowly blame virtue. Strength had lifted India to the higher rank. Weakness failed to maintain it there.

CHAPTER VII

CHINA UNDER THE HAN DYNASTY

SHI-HUANG-TI was a very powerful monarch. His ancestors, princes of the province of Tsin, had led their armies over mountain and plain and had welded the disorderly provinces into the one great Empire of Tsina, or China. But beyond its frontiers, to the north and west, were countless hordes of barbarians; particularly those savage sons of the devils, the Huing-nu (Huns), who age after age poured out from the pit in boiling floods no matter how many were slain. So Huang-ti decided to build a Great Wall, hundreds of miles long and twenty feet thick, to protect his dominion.

Hearing that 700,000 criminals idled in his jails, in spite of the tortures and mutilations with which he tried to deter men from evil ways, he set them to build the wall, to bridge the rivers, to make good roads, and to plant inns for traders along them. He ruled his country with an iron hand, a paternal heart, and a primitive but regal magnificence. Metal statues weighing 12,000 pounds each, commemorating his victories, adorned his palace in the city; and the Palace of Delight outside the city was so vast that in the central hall he could draw up 10,000 of his men in battle array. When the scholars murmured that this new imperialistic China was not in accord with the counsels of the Great Master, Kung, he sent out the order to burn all their books, except those which dealt with practical matters like medicine and magic, to bury alive a few hundred of the greybeards, and to set the rest to work with hoe and spade.

And when the time approached for Huang-ti to join

his ancestors he had a superb tomb prepared. Its floor was an immense bronze map of China, the great rivers represented by threads of quicksilver, its roof a picture of the starry heavens. Automatic engines which would shoot arrows and stones at a robber—for a hundred fair maids of the court in all their jewels were to be buried with him, to keep him company in the land of the shades—were placed in it, and the secrets of the entrance were guarded by killing the workmen who alone knew them. So he appointed his successor and departed; but there were so many greedy eyes upon the throne that the chief eunuch Chao Kao kept the death a secret until—well, the annalists say that when the day of the funeral came, and the hundred beautiful women (including ten of the Emperor's daughters) walked sad-eyed to the tomb, it was necessary to have a cart of putrid fish keep pace with the funeral chariot.

Such was China in the year 210 B.C. It was, many geologists estimate, about 1,000,000 years since primitive men had killed and buried each other in the land, yet even the more liberal historians do not claim that it reached the stage of mental development which we call civilization until about 2,000 B.C. There had, of course, been brighter days before the time of Huang-ti. More than 300 years earlier China had produced the great Kung-fu-tse, and the picture of the land in his youth which biographers give us is charming. We see the little Kung Chin learning his first lessons, which would be on refinement and dignity of behaviour, from his mother as she wove the silk from the mulberry trees in the bamboo hut; the village headman gravely watching to see if he could recommend the boy for education and a place in the civil service; the mutual helpfulness and merry picnics of a village-life that was more amiable and refined and better ordered than any in the west.

But it is not upon this life of the people that the crown

of civilization, the Golden Age, the concentration of wealth and its flowering in art and culture, depend, and China was even in those remote days a land of great sorrows which retarded its advance. It had not, like the kingdoms of the west, a stimulating contact with equal or superior countries. Instead, a sea of barbarism surged against the entire vast range of its land-boundaries, and few years passed without an invasion that left the placid villages in ruins. Even when the nearer barbarians were subdued and their lands opened to the Chinese of the overpopulated valley of the Yellow River, they too often left behind them the fine old traditions of the homeland, and robust adventurers fought for lordship over them. Think of the effect in America of the expansion over the West.

These petty princes brought another affliction which in its intensity and malevolence was almost peculiar to ancient China. Their chief pride was in the number and beauty of their wives and concubines, and it was natural that they should often seek these flowers among the wild roses of uncultivated gardens. Many of these young beauties were as hard, merciless, and covetous as the chatelaines and damosels of the European Age of Chivalry; for in both cases the poet's dream of women as soft as their silks and dainty as their jewels is a myth. They introduced new tortures and poisons from their half-barbaric countries, and they fought viciously to steal the throne for their sons from the legitimate heir.

Thus, when a vigorous commander, Liu Pang, bloodily ended the confusion which had followed the death of Huang-ti, he named the son of his chief wife his successor and the mother regent for him. But Liu-Chi found after her husband's death that the Princess Tsi, a beautiful concubine of his, was intriguing to get the throne for her son. So Liu-Chi bade her guards lop off the lady's hands, feet, and ears, cut out her eyes and tongue, and throw

the poor body upon a dung-hill. She compelled her son, a boy of fourteen, to gaze at the horror, and, when he lost his mind and a few years later his life, she, sword in one hand and cup of poison in the other, ruled China until she died.

Yet out of this strange world emerged the first of what are called the two Golden Ages of Chinese history—the period of the Han Emperors. Han was a small principality which had been taken over by Liu Pang. Round the throne of the imperial virago he and another general, a “brainless Goliath,” fought until the country swam with blood, and Liu Pang won. But, when he became Emperor and founded the Han Dynasty, he showed himself equally magnanimous and statesmanlike. He repaired the ravages of war and restored trade and prosperity, making good the roads which led from the provinces to his capital and holding back the barbarians at the frontiers. It is claimed that his engineers built the first large suspension-bridges in history. He gave his people a code of laws, and he long resisted the pressure of his women and his courtiers to raise a splendid palace and live luxuriously. His widow, who usurped the power, checked the progress of China for some fifteen years, but at her death a rapid advance began.

The custom of polygamy led to the appearance of many such women under the Han Emperors, and they eventually ruined the Dynasty—one, says Prof. Latourette, of “the most glorious in China’s long history.” But this and other evils were now curbed by the inauguration of the moral reign of Kung-fu-tse. The sage had lived more than 300 years earlier, but it was chiefly his contemporary, Lao-tse, who had in the meantime guided the Chinese, for such rulers as Huang-ti and the horrid Liu-Chi had been devout Taoists. One might maliciously reflect how the mystic and spiritual philosophy—for even he had no idea of founding a religion—of Lao-tse ruled China in its semi-barbaric days while the purely utilitarian and

humanitarian code of Kung raised it to its highest level and remained, never degenerating into a religion, the inspiration of all that was best in the country for 2,000 years. But let us be just even to moralists. Taoism would have made Lao-tse shudder if he had had a foresight of it. We must not say more than that the mystic setting of his code of conduct made it, like Buddhism, more exposed to the contagion of the primitive religions of Asia.

One of the most recent writers on Kung-fu-tse, G. Soulié de Morant, says that "few men have, like Confucius, intellectually formed and morally directed one third of the globe for twenty-five centuries." It is ungracious to quarrel with writers for their generosity, but we may say, as all authorities do, that from about 200 B.C. until in our time young China has, not without respect, pronounced Kung-fu-tse out-dated, his plain human code of behaviour has been the supreme guide of the educated Chinese—in fact, a missionary has written that you can disarm an angry crowd by quoting his words—and has been the inspiration of the two Golden Ages and all the best periods of Chinese history.

We saw how Huang-ti, who lived in a circle of Taoist priests and magicians, ordered that the Confucian books should be burned. Paper had not yet been invented—the Chinese invented it under the Han Emperors—but the scholars had large numbers of books in which the Confucian learning was painted or written with fine brush on pages of silk. Modern Chinese writers protest that there was not in Huang-ti's time so great a holocaust of precious books as European scholars allege, but no one disputes that the possession of them was forbidden under dire penalties and that only those which were hidden away survived. And when the fierce Empress died, in the year 179 B.C., and the good Wen-ti came to the throne, the old men joyously brought out their precious tomes from the roofs of their huts or the caves in the hills, for the reign of Taoism was over.

The restoration of literature to honour soon proved its value. If China had a characteristic, or nearly characteristic, vice in the intrigues of princesses and eunuchs of the harem, it had an entirely characteristic virtue in the nation-wide appreciation of learning, which the wise Emperor encouraged. Men of learning had the prestige which soldiers, who were in China regarded as a painful necessity, enjoyed elsewhere. A place in the civil service was the ambition which age inspired in youth, and education was the path to it. Into the countless villages again spread the story of Kung Chin (the boyhood name of the sage) earning his promotion by assiduous study and correct behaviour, and in countless schools youths slowly learned the thousands of characters and mastered the contents of the King. You may read the translation of these classical Confucian works to-day and wonder where the inspiration is. Read Chinese history. Long before the twenty years of his reign were over Wen-ti could boast that there were not 400 criminals in all his jails; though he abolished mutilation as a punishment and forbade the penalizing of a criminal's family. He was the father of his people. When courtiers urged him to raise a monument of his beneficent reign by building a tower that would cost, they told him, 100 bars of gold, he said: "No, I will not spend on this building what would be a fortune to ten families."

But it was the reign of Wu-ti (156-87 B.C.), sixth monarch of the Dynasty, which proved "one of the most famous in the history of China," as Gowen and Hall say in their excellent *Outline History of China*. A modern Chinese writer, Mr. Li Ung Bing (*Outlines of Chinese History*), pronounces this "one of the most important periods of Chinese history." In this reign appeared the Father of Chinese history, Szuma Chien, and he picturesquely describes the elevation of the country by the great Emperor. Before he began his work the distress was terrible and

general. The servants of the Emperor could not get four horses of the same colour to draw the royal chariot, and men in the highest civil and military positions rode in bullock-carts. The poor could not afford these, and old men and children staggered under loads.

But before half the long reign of Wu-ti was over the face of China was transformed. "The streets were thronged with horses that belonged to the people, and on the highways whole droves were to be seen, so that it became necessary to prohibit the public use of mares." A man who rode a mule was despised and not permitted to join convoys of men who rode on horse. Drought and famine were unknown. Grain was so abundant that it rotted in the imperial granaries and lay about the streets. "The village elders ate meat and drank wine," while the merchants and nobles entered upon a rivalry which carried art and luxury to an unprecedented height. Wu-ti introduced copper coins, and there were so many "hundreds of millions" of these stored in the capital that "the strings which held them together rotted." From end to end of the Empire the roads and bridges, even the temples and old palaces, were repaired, canals were dug, and so brisk did trade become that the stores in the cities were packed with goods. The Emperor's advisers even devised an economic system to meet the alternation of boom and slump which disturbed trade 2,000 years ago as it does to-day; though all that I can make of this very early attempt to control prices is that the merchants were ordered to buy when commodities were dear and sell when they were cheap. There does seem to have been a good deal of regulation of trade, transport, and industry.

All this was accomplished in the face of grave difficulties. Nearly all his reign Wu-ti had to fight against barbaric invaders, especially the Huns: the skin-clad, wiry horsemen whose great droves of horses, cattle, and

camels quickly devoured the food of a vast region and compelled them to move. Had it not been for the terrible expense of his huge armies, Wu-ti would have made his people still more prosperous, but the financial problem strained the wit of his advisers. He had begun his reign by insisting that every office in the Empire was open to talent, and talent only, but the time came when he had to sell military distinctions to the highest bidders. At one time he introduced what we may call the first banknotes that are known in economic history, though they were not bits of paper but pieces of the fine skin of a rare species of white deer which he kept in his park.

One may wonder how all this is related to the philosophy or ethic of Kung-fu-tse, but from a very early age the Emperor determined that all offices should be held by men of ability, and the highest test of ability was to master the thousands of characters of the written language and make a thorough study of the King—the five classical books in which Kung-fu-tse and his followers had collected all knowledge. He was a boy of sixteen when he came to the throne, and his mother was one of the many masterful women who appear in the history of China. She was a Taoist, and the learning of the Taoist priests was a weird jumble of superstition, astrology, and magic, and they naturally refused to communicate this to the common people, whom they preferred to leave in complete ignorance. The Empress died, however, five years after her son's accession, and some years later he adopted a unique and very profitable policy.

Many writers say that at the beginning of his reign he issued a proclamation that men of talent and virtue were to be sought all over the Empire and sent up to the capital. It would be a miracle if a Chinese prince in his teens, overawed by a masterly Taoist mother and dividing his day between his youthful ardour for the harem and the ponderous society of his mother's priests and counsellors,

had thus broken from his silken bondage and evinced a ripe Confucian wisdom. He seems rather to have been in early manhood when the distress of the country moved him to purge the entire administration and fill every office with men of merit. Yet we do not quite understand even this unless we recall a page of Chinese history which few ever read.

More than 100 years before Huang-ti built the Great Wall there had been in the duchies of old China an intellectual ferment which was more lively than that which had produced Kung-fu-tse two centuries earlier. We learn, not without ironic reflections, how near the world came to our modern ideas 2,300 years ago. There was an ancient Tolstoi, one Mo Ti, who preached universal love and contempt of wealth and pleasure. There was a Bolshevik apostle, Hyu Hing, with an immense following among the workers, who wanted to abolish princes, nobles, and capitalists and make all men equal. There was the epicurean oracle of the rich and middle-class, Yang Chu, who said, in almost so many words: "Let us eat and drink and be merry, for to-morrow we die." And greater than any of these was Meng-tse, who drew the inevitable social and democratic conclusions from the principles of his great master Kung-fu-tse. Princes held their power by the will of the people and must serve them or be deposed. Even Heaven, the vague something above which educated Chinese recognized, was only "a symbol of the collective will of the people," as a modern Chinese writer on Meng-tse says. The land must be divided among the people. War and armies must be abolished. Penal law must be reformed. . . .

Meng-tse's denial of the rights of rulers condemned him to failure in that land of petty kings and princes and has until the present century given the preference to Kung-fu-tse, but one suspects that the Confucianism which Wu-ti adopted had a tinge of Mencianism. The

Emperor ordered his provincial officers to seek out and send to him all men of outstanding ability and all youths of promise. It was an ancient custom that the headman of a village should report any bright and properly behaved pupil for promotion, but Wu-ti incorporated this in a vast imperial policy. In time he imposed a heavy penalty upon governors who, seeing how old favourites were being displaced, neglected this duty. Probably until recent times, when we provided the ladder of education, no other kingdom secured such a large volume of ability for its service. No "mute inglorious Miltons" were suffered to remain inarticulate in the villages or on the hillsides of China. Farmers, shepherds, carpenters, and sandal-makers were taken from their employment and sent to the capital. No hereditary mediocrities were left in office; and this had the additional advantage of curbing the treacherous old feudal nobles. Even wit without high ability appealed to Wu-ti more than a great name. One aspirant, Tung-fang So, wrote the Emperor:—

I am twenty-two years of age. I am nine feet three inches in height. My eyes are like swinging pearls, my teeth like a row of shells. I am as brave as Men Pen, as prompt as Chin Chi, as pure as Pao-Shu-ya . . .

He won favour and became a poet and a friend of the Emperor, who loved poets and himself composed odes which were, experts say, tinged with "an Epicurean melancholy."

Chiefly he relied upon solid scholarship to develop the talent of the men who were sent to him. He created a special rank of "the scholar with a vast knowledge of the five Classical Books," and he later ordered that fifty promising pupils should be attached to each scholar. He offered prizes for essays on the best method of government, and he summoned each province to select and send to the court the man with the best moral character. He

thus not only secured an immense civil service of able and upright men for the administration of his well-organized Empire, but he also imprinted deep upon the mind of China its characteristic respect for learning. Several of his generals were poets of distinction. It is said of one of his high officials that he would not have even slave-girls in his mansion who could not quote the classical books, and that a merchant offered a poet, who refused the mercenary proposal, 100,000 cash to name him in one of his poems.

The Emperor had a library of 10,000 volumes and paid generously for beautiful copies of books. I have said that he encouraged Szu-ma Chien to write the first substantial history of China, and he set the same scholar, who was skilled in astronomy and astrology, to supervise the laborious work of reforming the calendar. He founded a Bureau of Music, and among its duties was, although Wu-ti himself clearly had no religion, the provision of better hymns for the temples. He sent a group of scholars to learn the truth about the mysterious Far West, whence traders brought strange stories of the civilization of India and of Buddhism, and, although the Huns captured them and held them prisoners for ten years, they placidly, Chinese-fashion, resumed the journey and brought back to Wu-ti very welcome information about peoples as far as Turkestan. It was the first part of the bridge connecting East and West, but it would be another century before the silks of China would find their way to the Roman market across Persia or through the passes of the Hindu-Kush.

China suggests to the modern mind not only a land of rigid conservatism, a trait which was simply the result of long isolation and is rapidly disappearing, but a land of exquisite and delicate art. Babylon had been from the nature of its environment a heavy city of clay, Athens a city of marble. Chinese cities became by the same

force of circumstances mainly bamboo constructions, and the material lent itself to a peculiarly picturesque style of architecture—the temple, the pagoda, the rich man's spacious and airy one-storey mansion in a garden of delicate loveliness. Here again Wu-ti set the seal of his genius upon China. Heavy stone-work was little known until a later Han Emperor introduced Buddhism, and porcelain was not invented until centuries later. But in small sculpture (bronze, jade, ivory, etc.) and lacquer and inlaid work the Chinese artist was already supreme, and good taste was allied everywhere with a zeal for poetry and culture in the creation of China's first Golden Age.

The splendour was a little tarnished even before the fifty-seven years' reign of Wu-ti closed. A favourite concubine persuaded him, on a false charge, to execute his eldest son. In his melancholy he fell away from the healthy code of Kung-fu-tse and surrendered to the Taoist priests. Under his feebler successors these women too often won their way, and they, Mr. Li Ung Bing observes, brought the great dynasty to the dust about the beginning of the Christian Era. Since a branch of it regained the throne in another part of China, historians count the reign of the Han Dynasty from 206 B.C. to A.D. 220, but it did not recover the brilliance of the Golden Age. China, however, isolated as it again became and surrounded by an ocean of barbarism, never experienced a reaction as long and as squalid as the European Middle Ages. The spirit of Kung-fu-tse, of Meng-tse, and of Wu-ti haunted it, and we shall presently find it higher than ever in its art and culture, a great civilization shining upon a planet that had for the most part sunk back into barbarism.

CHAPTER VIII

ROME IN THE DAYS OF HADRIAN

WE now know that man, or the thing which was to become man, plodded heavily, never lifting his eyes to the horizon, during tens of millions of years towards his unknown goal. Between 5,000 and 6,000 years ago some groups of the human family attained the first level of civilization. But each small area on which they built cities and temples and arranged their lives in a social fabric was an island in an ocean of barbarism. There was no prospect of stability for the new type of life unless those areas expanded and their people entered into friendly and stimulating relations with each other. Instead, we saw, they, or their rulers, developed a spirit of bloody imperialistic enterprise, and there was a long phase of poignant destructiveness. Yet the beneficent influence of the contact of races with different cultures continued amidst all the ruin of Empires, and the race advanced more rapidly than ever between about 400 B.C. and A.D. 200. The field of civilization expanded until the whole race seemed at last to have a chance of emerging from barbarism.

The poet Juvenal, writing about the beginning of the reign of Hadrian and chiding his fellow-Romans for not concentrating upon the welfare of their Empire, complained that they asked each other such idle questions as "What is the latest news from China?" At the other extreme of the known world the stout remains of Hadrian's Wall remind us that the Romans had already constructed a fair civilization in Britain. Thus at the beginning of the second century of the Christian Era more than half

the race, spreading from the Atlantic Ocean to the China Sea, was lifted above barbarism.

The vitalizing centre of it all, the heart of the great Greek-Roman civilization, was the Mediterranean Sea. We saw what part its shipping had played in the days of Thales, of Pericles, and of Ptolemy. Now fleets of larger vessels linked Egypt with Syria, Greece, and Rome, or sailed from Italy to Africa, Gaul, and Spain. Four races, ten nations, mingled on the large passenger-vessels and in the ports, and ships of 2,000 to 3,000 tons bore corn or marble, Egyptian obelisks, and Greek sculpture to Rome. And from the chief ports roads which in places endure to this day, often crossing bridges which our heavy traffic still uses, pierced the various countries and carried the agents and agencies of civilization. A man could have ridden on horse—he could have walked afoot if he had been so minded—from Eboracum (York) to Jerusalem, except for the short sea-trip from Britain to Gaul. The Emperor Hadrian, spreading the feat over a number of years, did this, and more than this, often dismounting to walk, bareheaded, with his men.

It was a high civilization which he and other Romans extended to the 100,000,000 people of the Empire. The libel dies hard, though any writer with a regard for truth ought to be ashamed to repeat it, that the Romans of imperial days were callous, selfish, vicious folk, the degenerate descendants of the strong Romans of the Republic. We may admit that the earlier Romans had been in a large measure compelled to resort to aggression and conquest because their land, unlike that of the Greeks with its mountain-barrier, was exposed to a constant downpour of barbarians from the north. But they had let this natural development of the military character carry them on to a lust for conquest and exploited wealth, a brutal enslavement of millions of the conquered people, a rivalry for power that reddened the soil of the Republic with

Roman blood, a fierce joy in the "sports" of the amphitheatre. Most of these vices were now eliminated. Slavery was not a tithe of what it had been in the days of Cæsar, and the slave was protected from cruelty by law. Aggression and the lust of conquest were abjured, most firmly of all by Hadrian, and a series of the most admirable rulers any country has ever known, the so-called Stoic Emperors, devoted themselves to promoting the welfare and happiness of their people in every province. Modern historians demand little modification of Gibbon's famous encomium of that age (A.D. 96-180):—

If a man were called to fix the period in the history of the world during which the condition of the human race was most happy and prosperous, he would, without hesitation, name that which elapsed from the death of Domitian to the accession of Commodus (*Rise and Fall*, ch. III).

Friedlaender, the highest authority on Roman character, calls it "an age which raised itself by its own effort to higher and purer views of morality than all the ages which preceded it" (*Roman Life and Manners*, III, 280); and the Protestant historian Dr. Emil Reich scornfully lashes those of his co-religionists who continue, in spite of modern scholarship, to speak of "rotten Romans" and "profligacy" (*History of Civilization*, p. 371).

The city of Rome was the greatest city that the earth had yet borne. It had no buildings which equalled the few exquisite gems with which the architects and sculptors of the Periclean age had enriched Athens, but its civic centre was finer than that of Athens and incomparably more handsome than the central square of any city of mediæval or modern times. The level space between the Seven Hills, the cattle-market and refuge of the primitive Romans, had become the Roman Forum: a spacious square crowded with statues (largely Greek) and lined

with temples and public buildings in white or coloured marble, with the white marble temple of Jupiter, the roof thickly plated with gold, on the Capitol at one end. If we recall that very little smoke came from the charcoal braziers in the winter and the wood-furnaces of the baths, and think of the brilliance of the Italian sun and sky during most of the year, we have some idea of the beauty of it.

And this older Forum was not the only breathing and playing space of the citizens. The Emperors built new Fora leading off from it: wide avenues lined with marble colonnades through which, as one sees in many of Sir L. Alma Tadema's paintings, richly coloured processions wound on festivals, and in the shade of which tens of thousands could shelter from the sun on the cool marble pavement. Hadrian, with a boldness that would make the richest of modern city councils shudder, cut one of these through the densest and dingiest quarter of the city.

It is true that the overwhelming majority of the 1,000,000 citizens were housed in high and thickly crowded tenements, with narrow streets, in the valleys between the low hills on which the marble mansions and the gardens of the rich sprawled spaciously, but one must avoid the fallacy of comparison with modern cities. The bells rang for the cessation of the day's work at three in the afternoon, and, except during the occasional cold snap in winter, one lived out of doors—in the Fora, in the princely baths and gymnasia, and so on. The tenements themselves, nests of small and poorly furnished rooms with oiled paper in the narrow window-frames, had one advantage which few large cities had until modern times—a plentiful supply to each storey of pure water (free) brought by massive aqueducts from distant hills. A Roman worker—and, as modern scholars, correcting the old libels, have determined, there were in Rome nearly 800,000 free workers to 200,000 (mainly domestic, and

lightly worked) slaves—gladly accepted cramped quarters which gave him only a few minutes' walk to the superb Fora and their picturesque life and to the many places of entertainment.

There was probably no happier, certainly no more fortunate, worker in ancient history. The educational system, which had had no counterpart in Greece, was not yet as complete as it would later be, but there was already free elementary schooling for all, the children gathering in a shaded colonnade or under shelter of some building to repeat their twice-two-are-four. Higher education also was free; and there were schools in every quarter of Rome and all towns of the Empire. Work does not seem to have been onerous, and the workdays were less numerous than they are in any country to-day. A time would come when the Roman workers, and those of the whole of Europe, would work, century after century, from sunrise to sunset on all but about sixty days of the year; and they would listen docilely to assurances that they were far better off than those poor workers of pagan days! The truth is that the Roman worker had whole-day holidays on at least one-third, and under some Emperors one-half, the days of the year.

On nearly 100 days of the year the Emperor or some wealthy Senator or a general returning with rich spoil from the wars gave, gratis, what the Romans specifically called "the games"—the gladiatorial combats in the Amphitheatre, preceded by a gorgeous procession through the Forum. Let us admit all the horrors of the arena—they were nearly as bad as the larger tournaments in the Age of Chivalry—but we remember that the Romans were only a few centuries out of barbarism, and the general attitude had been hardened by 500 or 600 years of warfare. It is, however, a libel that the bloody sport of the Amphitheatre was the supreme pleasure of the Romans. Only 90,000 could crowd into it, while the seats of the

great Circus accommodated 400,000, and all ancient authors tell us that the fiercest passion of the Romans was for the bloodless amusements—chariot-races, juggling, acrobatics, etc.—of the Circus. Besides these there were the theatres in which mimes made them rock with laughter. All these entertainments were free to the Roman people.

For one entertainment—the baths—they paid; but the price was, as far as one can give it in our language, only half a farthing, while the word “baths” is wholly inadequate. Think of one of our most luxurious Turkish baths (without the distinctively modern equipment), and imagine it enlarged into an immense brick structure, lined with marble and porphyry, in which tens of thousands of men and women frivol in the vast hot or cold basins, exercise in a gymnasium, or read in a library, and you have some idea. That behaviour in the baths was unrestrained is false. Indeed, Hadrian himself, who often bathed amongst the crowd of workers, in his later and more sober years forbade the sexes to mix in the princely baths.

Withal, this Roman worker, who is so often pitied as the victim of a sordid capitalism, though no Romans ever approached the wealth of our modern multi-millionaires, had free medical attendance, partly by municipally paid doctors and partly by the priests of the temples of *Æsculapius*. He had to a very large extent free food, for wheat, the staple food, was distributed on the Bread Steps three times a week to 200,000 workers. He had his trade unions, the idea of which had come through Greece from Lydia, the tanners, carpenters, etc., of each district forming a “college” with its own club-room (often given by a rich patron); and in this, as extant foundation-stones show, women and slaves were, often at least, admitted on an equal footing. Nor have we any reason whatever to accept the old fable of promiscuous conduct

in these gatherings. Juvenal scourged the aristocratic women, whom he never knew, of the generation before his own, but "in his own modest class," says Sir Samuel Dill, "female morality, as we may infer from the inscriptions and other sources, was probably as high as it ever was, as high as the average morality of any age."

These inscriptions, which have been unearthed in thousands in Italy, have shown the untruth of many of the legends about the Romans which were fabricated in days when the word "pagan" implied every sort of evil. They afford evidence that character, even chastity, was esteemed in a higher class of women than that of Juvenal. Sir Samuel Dill, the highest authority on Roman life at this stage, quotes the epitaph which a Consul raised over the remains of his wife :—

Why mention domestic virtues and chastity? . . .
This is common to all honourable women.

At the other and lowest level of the social scale the inscriptions testify that the number of illegitimate children was smaller than it was in most countries until recent times. One inscription, found in the soil of a small Italian town, records that of 300 orphans in the local orphanage only three were illegitimate.

Among women of the richer class, on the other hand, we have evidence of a curiously modern mental vitality. One of the public buildings of the Forum was a large hall in which orators of the highest ideals, such as Dio Chrysostom, discoursed on the ethic of social questions. He, for instance, in speeches which we still have—for shorthand was familiar to the Romans—roundly denounced slavery as a crime against natural law. Writers of the time tell us that the Emperor Trajan's wife, Plotina, formed a debating circle (Senate) for ladies, and this seems to have been connected with such orations as those of Dio. Hadrian himself was, before he became Emperor

—Dio died before his accession—a close friend of the high-minded orator, who was sometimes seen standing beside him in his chariot on the streets.

The inscriptions have surprised us most, perhaps, in revealing that the rich Romans, who have passed for ages as a callous and selfish class, practised charity and philanthropy more generously than the rich did in any age until our own. The first Emperor of what is called the Stoic series, Trajan, inaugurated the great age of philanthropy, and before the series closed with the death of Marcus Aurelius there was not a needy or helpless class in Italy that lacked succour. Sir Samuel Dill doubts “whether private benefactions under the Antonines were less frequent and generous than in our own age.” It is probable that Hadrian performed the philanthropic work which is attributed to Trajan—a bluff, indeed coarse, soldier who spent most of his years in the provinces—and it is certain that after his accession he greatly extended the work. By the end of his life 300,000 Italian orphans were fed by public or private charity, and an immense number of homes for orphans, the aged, and widows appeared.

The slave also now found a substantial mitigation of his condition. Hadrian passed laws to prevent masters from killing or mutilating slaves or selling them for gladiatorial or other shameful work. He sent a rich woman into exile for five years for cruelty to her slaves, and it is probable that he opened the law-courts to slaves who had serious complaints against their masters. He suppressed the practice of torturing slaves to extort evidence, and through the great Stoic lawyer *Æmilianus*, his close friend, he purified the code and the administration in many other respects. The old law which confiscated the property of certain offenders was modified in favour of the children, and it was enacted that no pregnant woman should be punished. Corrupt officials and venal magistrates

were everywhere drastically punished. Religious toleration was, in fine, considered an elementary duty of the State. There has, we now know, been far less persecution of Christians than was once supposed. There was none, anywhere in the Empire, under Hadrian.

And these advantages of the Roman people Hadrian made strenuous efforts to extend to the whole of his vast Empire. Most readers will have seen photographs of the massive Roman aqueducts and other remains in the south of France, the superb bridges in Spain, the great wall in Northumberland, the ruins of splendid cities on the hills of Asia Minor or in the deserts of Syria and Africa. To Hadrian more than to any other Emperor the provinces, which some imagine to have been simply exploited by Rome, owed this extension of the best features of its civilization.

He spent nearly twelve out of the twenty years of his reign (A.D. 117-138) travelling round the Empire, from North Britain to Arabia, generally eschewing the luxury which he could have commanded. "He wore no covering on his head either amid Celtic snows or in Egyptian heat," says a Roman writer; and others tell us how he often discarded his horse and walked with his men, sharing their rough fare, for twenty miles in a day. With him were engineers and secretaries who took down on their wax tablets his instructions to build bridges, aqueducts, baths, theatres, and so on. He made even Athens more beautiful, giving it a fringe of superb gardens and restoring its schools. Perhaps there was no part of his work which more closely appealed to him, for he was a fine Greek scholar and drew deep inspiration from the art of Athens and the philosophy of Epicurus. He trod the soil of Northumberland when he ordered the building of the great wall, and he rebuilt ancient Londinium (London); and a few months later he was looking for public works to repair in Spain and Morocco. In subsequent tours, each of

which lasted two or three years, while a wisely chosen council ruled Rome for him, he traversed the whole of the vast eastern half of the Empire, strengthening the frontier and enriching the cities with aqueducts, public baths, fountains, and places of entertainment.

With such age-old prejudice do we still write history, or at least truckle to prejudice in our writing of it—I speak, of course, not of responsible historians but of our popular oracles—that, whereas Hadrian stands out almost more clearly than any other figure in ancient history, few have ever heard of him. Not many monarchs ascended the throne with so high and sound a conception of royal duty as he had or performed it with so much industry and success. He set out to realize the fine scheme of public service which Cæsar had devised—few, again, hear of this, though Mommsen has a most admiring chapter on it—and he wore himself out in realizing it; yet we talk of Constantine and Charlemagne and Louis XIV, who did incomparably less for civilization, and never of Hadrian. Even the one in 100 of our people who knows anything about ancient history knows no more about Hadrian than that he was a man of perverse morals who took about with him a beautiful Bithynian boy named Antinous and lived in a villa at Tivoli which seems to have been a sybaritic paradise. The truth is that he was fifty-three years old when he first saw Antinous, who was drowned three years later, and he was fifty-seven years old, with the shadow of death upon him, when he began to live at Tivoli.

Our historians find that Hadrian, whose service and accomplishments they fully recognize, was an enigmatic personality, a model to monarchs in the service of his people, yet a man of frivolous and depraved habits; a man of high attainments, yet ever ready for a carouse or a salacious joke. No one will defend his more morbid habits, though critics might be less unctuous if they took

the trouble to learn that the only positive evidence of these relates to the last decade of his life, that he had a sour and shrewish wife, and that these habits are as common in southern Italy to-day as they were in the time of Hadrian, and were still more flagrant in mediæval Italy. The serious student finds it more perplexing that in later life he attached to his suite, and apparently named as his successor, a degenerate wit of the Roman aristocracy, the father of Marcus Aurelius, the kind of voluptuary who reclined on a bed of rose-leaves and covered himself with lilies. Perhaps we may in this case accept the explanation that since Lucius Verus was consumptive, Hadrian knew that the man, who had been a close friend for years, would not live to inherit the purple and just enjoyed his gaiety for a few years.

Hadrian's critics miss a criterion which in our age ought easily to occur to them. It is that his conduct was consistently good when it was likely to have social consequences, while his defects were entirely of what the moralist calls the "self-regarding" character. He was at his coronation entitled to rich gifts from all the cities of the Empire, but, seeing that Trajan, a bluff soldier with no statesmanship, had emptied the treasury, he refused to receive them. He deposed his oldest friend and benefactor for urging the execution of nobles who had plotted to cheat him of the throne at the death of Trajan. He remitted overdue taxes to the extent of about £10,000,000 sterling. He refused to sanction any further aggression and gave peace and a high prosperity to the 100,000,000 citizens of the Empire. He hated and punished cruelty, injustice, and corruption in public life wherever he found them.

He was, in other words, a good Epicurean, as the Romans conceived the philosophy. It is usual to call the series of admirable Emperors to which he belongs the "Stoic Emperors," but only one of them, Marcus Aurelius, was a Stoic, and with him the brilliant series and the

prosperity of the Empire closed. Hadrian and the cultivated Romans of his time did not even accept the philosophy of Epicurus in its original sense, for it excluded both sensuous pleasure and public service. But from the Stoic and Epicurean philosophy they had derived a humanitarian creed without any religious basis or any ascetic tinge. The Empire had begun well, with the long and admirable reign of Augustus, but in the short reigns of three vicious Emperors in the first century £200,000,000, it is estimated, had been spent in corrupting Rome and destroying its finer elements. It was again sober, strong, and prosperous, and a more genial Epicureanism was the prevailing creed in the constructive and cultivated class.

All historians recognize that one very important cause of the recovery was that provincials were admitted in large numbers to the highest offices. Hadrian was part of the new blood. For centuries the Romans had planted colonies in the lands they conquered and civilized, and Hadrian came of the Spanish-Roman stock in Andalusia. His guardian had sent him to receive at Rome the finest education, in Greek and Latin letters, that the world could then give, and he had become an orator, a poet (both in Greek and Latin), a fair sculptor, and a good musician. His second guardian, the Emperor Trajan, another Spanish-Roman, had then summoned him to the camp, and he had fully shared Trajan's generous drinking, boisterous conversation, and military adventures; though he was also so close to the gifted and cultivated Empress Plotina, a serious Epicurean, as to give rise to scandal. He was robust in physique, preferring to climb mountains on the march rather than go round them—a tall, well-built man with curly dark-brown hair, and sparkling blue-grey eyes—and he was one of the most accomplished men in Roman society. Degeneration is the last word an informed person would apply to him. He was typical of the new and more humane strength of the Empire.

Since we have throughout this series of sketches found it of interest to ascertain, whenever possible, the inspiration or creed of the monarch who lifted civilization to the level of a Golden Age, I give these details about the personality of Hadrian. He had no religious beliefs, as all authorities admit, and assuredly he was no puritan. He might have said with the Stoic who is quoted by Pliny : " To mortal man God means the service of other mortals." But he was indifferent to such speculations and drew his inspiration from the common-sense materialistic philosophy of which even Ueberweg, the historian and critic of materialism, says :—

Epicureanism aided in softening the asperity and exclusiveness of ancient manners, and in cultivating the social virtues of companionableness, compatibility, friendliness, gentleness, beneficence, and gratitude, and so performed a work whose merit we should be careful not to underestimate.

And to the modern moralist who wonders how the philosophy of Epicurus could afford this inspiration I recommend the epitaph of Wren in St. Paul's Cathedral : " If you seek his monument, look around you." Twenty nations—more than half the known world—at peace and imbued with a feeling of international brotherhood : a world in which the rich were encouraged to help the needy and dependent, the slave was rising towards the stature of manhood, the life of all, from Spain to Syria, was, as far as possible, gladdened with art and free public service.

Antoninus Pius, who succeeded Hadrian, sustained, with less energy and ability, his spirit and his work. Marcus Aurelius, who closed this fine series of rulers, aimed, he thought, at an even higher ideal. But his mysticism separated him from his people, and, instead of, like his predecessors, adopting a strong man to succeed him, he left power to his depraved children, and Rome sank again to the Neronic level.

CHAPTER IX

CHINA UNDER THE TANG EMPERORS

WHEN Hadrian died, in the year A.D. 138, the flame of civilization burned more brightly, and lit a far wider range of the earth, than at any previous age in history. When the next creator of a Golden Age, the Chinese Emperor Tai Tsung, was born, in A.D. 600, civilization was almost extinct.

The Europe which the Romans had enriched with fine monuments and still finer institutions was rapidly sinking into barbarism. The million citizens of Rome had shrunk to 40,000, and they had sunk into such dense ignorance that they listened docilely to their leader, Pope Gregory, when he urged them to burn every book and break every marble statue which reminded them of the horrible days of the pagan Emperors. The temples and palaces and princely places of entertainment crumbled into dust, and the very ruins were shunned as the abodes of evil spirits. The country round Rome, which had for centuries borne the earth's richest crops, was a stinking swamp from which legions of devils (malaria-mosquitoes) issued annually to plague the Roman people. North Africa and all Europe—except that half-barbarous monarchs kept some state in Spain and Gaul—were equally degraded. The eastern Greek half of the old Empire, which had suffered no barbaric invasion, still had wealth and art, but social inspiration had died in it, and the men and women of its gorgeous imperial court at Constantinople were often hardly less barbarous than their people.

We leave it to those who think that religion is the richest inspiration of civilization to explain how it had fallen so

low in Europe and the Greek world, in spite of the superb older monuments which gleamed everywhere, that it would not again rise to the level of a Golden Age for more than 1,000 years; and we are generous in assigning one even then. The serious historian reflects rather upon another aspect of world history in what we call the Dark Age. Royal degeneration and barbaric invasions had destroyed civilization in Asia as well as in Europe. That entire expanse of the earth from the Atlantic to the China Sea which in the second century had been almost uniformly civilized was now almost uniformly debased. Yet we shall find the Asiatic half—China, India, and Persia—rising brilliantly in the seventh century while Europe sinks lower and lower, though there is much the same pressure of half-savage invaders in Asia as in Europe. The modern historian does not press these truths upon your notice, but the facts which he gives inexorably yield them.

Let us say, if you like, that Europe was not fortunate enough to produce a monarch who had both the strength and the ideals to achieve the work of redemption; for the Constantines and Justinians and Charlemagnes of whom some boast are rather tawdry figures in serious history. China, at the date we have reached, had the strong man without the ideals: the man who, as we have seen in other chapters, lays the foundations of a Golden Age. The Great Han Dynasty had perished 400 years earlier, and China, though it never sank to the depth of Europe's Dark Age, had suffered a long reaction. Once a sandal-maker became a king. At other times, the annalists growl, "the children of concubines, priests, old women, and eunuchs" ruled the country. One adventurer found 10,000 eunuchs in the royal palace when he seized power, and he executed them all. Where, you ask, was the teaching of Kung-fu-tse? It had been displaced in the minds of rulers and statesmen by Buddhism, which is much more spiritual.

Yang Ti, who ruled the central part of the old Empire in

the year 600, returned to the guidance of Kung. With 1,000,000 men he chased the barbarians beyond the frontiers and restored the unity of the greater part of China. He founded many colleges and relit the old veneration of the Classical Books. He engaged 100 scholars to arrange all existing knowledge in a great encyclopædia. But his mind was not strong enough to contemplate life from the height of a throne.

He was, the authorities say, "an imperial madman," "a half-barbaric genius." He would have a palace and a park such as the world had never known before, and he compelled 2,000,000 men and women, driving them with such brutality that many died, to construct them. They had to make a canal 500 miles long for traffic, and Yang Ti and his gay harem sailed along it in a fleet of superb barges. He drained the wealth of the country to support his wars of conquest, and the low murmurs in the land rose to cries of defiance and revolt. He ordered all the villagers to live in the towns, so that his bowmen might shoot all who moved about the country, and rebels lopped off province after province of his Empire while he raved in the luxurious palace in the heart of his stupendous park. He was lord even of the seasons, for when the leaves of the trees in his palace and the petals of his flowers fell he had leaves and flowers of silk made to replace them.

Among his vassals was Li Yuan, Duke of Tang, who read his Classics and fingered his silks and jades in a modest palace on the mountains. Other princes and the Taoist priests whom Yang Ti persecuted, in grave violation of the teaching of the Master, appealed to him in vain to lead the revolt, but of his four children two had in their hearts the fire which so often burns in what we foolishly call the cold immobility of Chinese character: the fire which makes tireless soldiers of boys and girls in China to-day, as it did 2,000 and 3,000 years ago. One was the Duke's second son, a boy of fifteen, Li Shih-Min, fresh from triumphs in

the schools and itching for a sword. The other, whose age is not given, but she must have been a girl in her teens, was his sister, Li Shih. They were very comely; even the boy had "the grace of a dragon and the beauty of a phœnix," but they were also lithe and sinewy from hunting in the bracing mountain air. They pleaded in vain with their father that he should put himself at the head of the rebels and take the throne from Yang Ti.

The father was a mild, easy-going scholar, and he objected that good Confucians did not rebel against princes; and I imagine that Shih-Min retorted that Meng fully approved the deposition of wicked rulers. One day a summons to the Court reached the Duke and he set out in state, but he returned hurriedly, saying that he had learned that he was to have been executed. He now yielded to his children, and at the ripe age of sixteen Shih-Min set out, at the head of the Tang army, on one of the most brilliant of military careers; and his sister, first picking up with a brigand and his men, raised another army and with it cut her way across the provinces towards the capital. And in a year or two (A.D. 618) they took Yang Ti's capital and palace, made an end of him, and put their father on the throne of China.

The Princess Li, unfortunately, here fades from the chronicles, but Prince Chin, as the boy became, left it to his brothers to enjoy the delights of the table and the harem and turned once more to the battle-field with precocious strength of mind and body. Only two provinces of the old Empire acknowledged the rule of the capital, and Turks and Tatars lowered on the horizon. Eleven other princes claimed the imperial throne. Yet in six years of incessant fighting the youth conquered them all, put loyal governors in their places, and drove the invaders beyond the Wall. His wars do not concern us except that we will note presently, as a rare phenomenon in history, how, after twelve years of strenuous and victorious fighting, he was

able—indeed glad—to sheathe his sword, save for the occasional need to repel an invader, and become one of the most constructive and most humane monarchs in history. There were times when his armies numbered 900,000 men, and he so raised the prestige of China that fawning embassies sought his capital from the south of Asia, the wilds of Siberia, and the proud Court of the Christian king at Constantinople. He was no chocolate soldier, for he fought at times at the head of the troops until his silken sleeves were sodden with blood.

At the age of twenty-four he came back to Chang-an, the old city which his father had chosen as his capital, now the greatest city in Asia. He was in the flower of his age and manly beauty, and people wept when they saw him, in golden armour over his silk, ride at the head of 10,000 superbly dressed horsemen and an immense army, with vast numbers of captives and a long train of carts in the rear loaded with the loot of Asia.

Chang-an was laid out with, for China, a rare symmetry. From the chief gate of the five-mile-square city the Street of Heaven, a splendid avenue, 100 yards wide and lined with stores and houses which blazed with colour, led straight to the gate of the Imperial City, where the government offices and the houses of officials occupied a space of three square miles. Beyond this was the palace, and behind this was a park which spread the delicate Chinese beauty of lake and pagoda, garden and pavilion, over a space of sixty-three square miles. But the luxury was distasteful to Shih-Min—such things “soften the heart of a prince,” he said—and he chose a wife who proved one of the most noble women in the history of China. It is said that he found 3,000 dainty ladies in the harem and courteously provided for them elsewhere.

It is said sometimes that his record is here stained by the murder of his two brothers, the elder of whom was the rightful heir to the throne. To this point we do not claim

for him more than that he was a great soldier, though even in his military record there are instances of unusual magnanimity. When he took a city, and his soldiers claimed the right to loot it, he ransomed it out of his own treasury. He did not, as the Romans did, make slaves of the masses of captives whom he brought to China. He had them planted on the soil and bade them learn the arts of peace in freedom. He protested vigorously when he heard that his father had had a Turkish Khan murdered. Moreover, modern historians—there is a good biography of him by C. P. Fitzgerald (*Son of Heaven*; 1933)—find that his punishment of his brothers was inevitable. The elder was naturally jealous; the younger a degenerate of a familiar royal type, who used to make the ladies of his harem fight, sometimes to death, like gladiators, and in the manner of Nero roamed the city at night with a group of roysterers and held orgies in the houses of citizens. Round both princes flatterers and poisonous parasites gathered, and beyond question there was a conspiracy to assassinate Shih-Min. "Very well," he said, "it is my life or theirs." The fault lay largely with his weak and indulgent father, and he now (A.D. 626) abdicated in favour of his gifted son.

Tai Tsung ("Great Ancestor") is the name which, in the fashion of the time, the Chinese gave him after his death. It was as the Emperor Li Shih-Min that, at the age of twenty-six or twenty-seven, after a military career of which a veteran would have been proud, he entered upon what even the clerical authority Dr. Giles calls "a reign of unrivalled brilliance and glory." Demetrius Boulger rightly says of him in his *History of China*: "No ruler of any country has had sounder claims to be entitled Great." In war he had only one unimportant reverse in thirty years, but he was even greater in peace. How many soldiers with an army of 1,000,000 men and a despotic rule over 50,000,000 industrious subjects—

20,000,000 to 30,000,000 in China proper—with a unique record of military glory, would have sheathed the sword at the age of twenty-seven and sworn that there would be no further aggression? Shih-Min announced that to the world by changing the name of the city to Si-an, which means Peace of the West. Except for the need to repel invaders he inaugurated for China a period of 130 years of peace and all the splendour of the Tang Dynasty.

Yang Ti had brought the country to beggary. Bandits and adventurers had torn to tatters its age-old dignity and peaceful prosperity. Shih-Min raised it in less than twenty years to such height as the Greek-Roman world had reached under Hadrian. You will find no article on Tai Tsung (and other great monarchs who are described in this book) in your encyclopædias, no page in your "histories of the world," though they will tell you all about Justinian of Constantinople and Pope Gregory of Rome. Yet there is no dispute about his genius and his work. Fitzgerald says (p. 206) :—

He became far more famous as a wise and far-seeing administrator than he had been as a conquering hero. To the Chinese the name of the great Emperor is more familiar as the model of the Confucian prince than as the brilliant victor of many battles.

None question that the Tang Period, which he opened, was the greatest in the history of Asia and one of the greatest in the history of the world until modern times. Some of the Golden Ages which will be here described, such as those of Italy and France, were tainted by a widespread viciousness, even coarseness, of character in the richer and better-educated class and a callous indifference to the sufferings of the people. There were defects in China under the Tangs, but the general character of the period is depicted both truthfully and prettily in these words of Sir J. C. Squire :—

Manners were perfect in that China: emotions were as delicate as the blossoms on the fruit-trees, and death came as gently as the petals of those blossoms fell. A benevolent, humorous, and æsthetic philosophy governed a kingdom of golden temples, shady groves, quiet waters, bamboo bridges, and cool houses in which small elegant ladies played lutes and drank aromatic tea from the most fragile porcelain. The general acceptance of a mature mild scepticism averted all the storms that come from fierce conviction, and the arrest of change enabled an innumerable people to savour to the last faint shade the established pleasures of their old commonplaces. There is all that: a fairyland, but one built up on a certain foundation.

We will not forget that these dainty willow-plate sketches of Chinese life describe the life of leisured elegance of the minority. They omit the life of the villages and of the poorer quarters of the towns. But even this was far less coarse and violent than the corresponding life in Europe in the seventh century, while the life of the "noble" in Gaul or Spain or Italy, and even in Constantinople, was often indescribably gross.

I have said that the Emperor was, unlike Hadrian, fortunate in having a perfect consort; and we may suppose that his sister co-operated with her in the early years. Chang Sun, the Empress, was beautiful, gifted, and a model of practical virtue. She supported all her husband's constructive work without interfering in politics. The annals ascribe to her more than one saying which to us may seem stilted and remote from life, though they fit a world of Confucians. "The practice of virtue, not the splendour of their appointments, confers honour upon men, especially princes," she would say to her husband. It reads rather like the headline of a copy-book, but we know what the Confucians meant by virtue. Kung did not

mind the prince's harem and the young man's visit to the house with blue shutters if they had sound social ideals. Chang Sun had such ideals. When she lay on her bed of death, unfortunately only four years after her husband's accession to the throne, she said to him :—

Put no jewels on my coffin. Let my head rest upon a wooden pillow. Fasten my hair with wooden pins. Do not listen to unworthy men. Build no costly palaces. Then I shall die happy.

Compare with this the lives, as summarized in Lecky's *History of European Morals*, for instance, of contemporary queens of Christian Gaul !

Whatever we may think of Shih-Min's surrender to the beautiful and spirited young concubine Wu Chao who succeeded to his affections, and about whose character historians differ, he maintained until the last gloomy years of his life the spirit which Chang Sun had recommended. He was told one day that a relative of the Empress had taken a bribe of several pieces of fine silk. Instead of degrading him, he sent him further pieces from the imperial store and explained to his ministers that the sight of these would sufficiently punish the man. His chief ministers had been counsellors of the elder brother who had conspired against him. He won their strict loyalty by employing and honouring them, and the oldest of them could at any time tell him, when necessary, unflattering truths as bluntly as a tutor. When a man proposed that he should detect and remove mere flatterers from his council by putting before it some quite unsound scheme and noticing if any approved of it, he replied that it was not honest to try men thus. One day he asked the chief of the court historiographers what they wrote about him. He approved when the man refused to tell him, saying that they wrote the simple truth, good and bad, and it was for publication only after his death.

In a European monarch who had despotic authority over at least 30,000,000 people these traits of character would suggest to us either an unpractical idealism or an ethical effeminacy, but Chinese character is at times as delicate as Chinese art without being in the least effeminate. Shih-Min transferred all the strength he had displayed in war to the organization and improvement of his kingdom. His officers and ministers were chosen with great sagacity, and owing to this and his hatred of corruption and injustice his vast Empire enjoyed a prosperity and tranquillity which it had not known for ages. Trade was fostered until the artistic products of China found their way to Japan—which now, under Chinese influence, first rose to the level of civilization—Thibet, and Siberia, and as far west as Syria and Greece. But we may confine ourselves to those aspects of Chinese life in the Golden Age which most clearly show the personal influence of the Emperor.

One of the most interesting, though not most important, is the remarkable toleration with which the Emperor welcomed and protected all races and all religions. One of his chief pleasures was to discuss their different customs and creeds with the envoys or merchants who came to Si-an from all parts of the civilized world; for it was no longer decently civilized westward of Constantinople. In China itself there was complete freedom to follow either Taoism or Buddhism or the simple ethic of Kung-fu-tse. Shin-Min himself had no religious ideas. Men of distinction in Chinese history are often misleading because, like the Master, they are apt to speak about Heaven or "the Will of Heaven," which meant nothing. Kung-fu-tse wished even princes who embraced his teaching to offer those ritual sacrifices to Heaven which were part of the tradition of the race. When Confucian ministers urged Shin-Min to do this he refused. "You ministers think," he said, "that these sacrifices will bring prosperity to the country. I cannot agree. If the Empire is at

peace, and each household has enough for its needs, what calamities could befall through neglect to make the sacrifices?"

More consistently than the materialistic Master himself he proposed, in Kung's words, to "respect spiritual beings, if there are any, but have nothing to do with them." And he soon found, doubtless to his amusement, that his liberality was a peculiarly Chinese virtue. Envoys from India would inform him that the religion of Buddha had been suppressed in the far greater part of that country. From the envoys of the Greek Emperor he learned the mysteries of the Christian religion. But his courteous endeavour to apprehend the doctrine of the Trinity and to recognize that the Golden Rule coincided with that given by Kung-fu-tse was rudely shaken when Nestorian monks reached China from Syria and vigorously explained to the Emperor that, not only were they bitterly persecuted by the Greek Emperor and his priests, but the doctrine of the Trinity was *not* contained in the New Testament, or the Christian Classical Book, to a Chinese translation of which Shih-Min listened with polite interest. The monks may also have told him how the Court at Constantinople had been degraded only a year or two earlier by the terrible mutilation of the Emperor and his mother and had witnessed more than 100 years of royal vice and barbaric violence; and they would surely describe how Rome and Europe had passed into a pitiful condition.

This was not all. The Nestorian (Unitarian) monks had taken refuge in the dominions of the King of Persia from the brutality of their Christian brethren, and from that country in turn came news of bitter religious hostility. Manichæans arrived in China and complained that, though their founder had been a Persian, the representatives of the orthodox Persian religion persecuted them truculently; and after some years numbers of this

orthodox body itself reached China and explained that a new religion, from Arabia, had been imposed upon them at the point of the sword. The comedy, as one feels almost compelled to call it, was complete when, before Shih-Min died, Arab merchants, who had taken over the Persian trade with China, came to boast that this new religion, Islam, was the last word in revealed truth.

Shih-Min invited them all to his court and listened to them with great interest. The Nestorians were permitted to build a small church, and the Jews had a synagogue. The Emperor's ministers were impatient with his liberality. He ought to suppress even Taoism, they said, since it distracted the attention of men from their affairs by teaching that there was a more important life beyond the grave; he ought to take these 100,000 Buddhist monks and 100,000 nuns that there already were in China and compel them to marry and bear citizens. The Emperor amiably refused, saying that "truth does not always bear the same name." When a Buddhist monk went to India without the requisite permission to travel, he sent for the man on his return and commissioned him to write a book on India which we still find valuable. No man of ancient times appreciated more fully than he the value of the free circulation of ideas.

This freedom of thought in regard to religion, which we now regard as an indispensable part of a high civilization, we have hitherto found only in the Roman world under Hadrian, and we shall not meet it again in perfect form, though there is an approach to it in the Arab-Persian world, until we reach modern times. The western world, from Arabia to the Atlantic, was sodden with religious persecution, and it assumed its vilest form in the Byzantine Empire which some would put almost on the level of China. We see the contrast between the two in another social respect, the conception of justice and the treatment of crime.

In the Byzantine (Greek) Empire, which was contemporary with Tang China, there was not only a painful abundance of coarse vice and violent crime, not least in the court itself, but the law sanctioned punishments which must make us hesitate even to speak of a Greek civilization at this time. Mutilation—the removal of eyes, ears, tongues, hands, feet, and sex-organs—was appallingly frequent, and there were other tortures, especially in religious quarrels, of a barbaric character.

In China under Shih-Min not only was the Code of Laws revised and humanized, but the Emperor insisted that criminals should be treated as they are in only one or two countries to-day. The numerous death-sentences of the old Sui Code were for the most part changed into fines or imprisonment, and it was decreed that an Emperor should not in future ratify a death-sentence until he had fasted and reflected upon it for three days. Shih-Min visited his jails, and in one he found 297 men under sentence of death. This was before his revision of the Code. He released them to work, on parole, in the fields, and, when they all returned at night, they were pardoned. His ministers, who were always encouraged to criticize his acts, disapproved his policy, and he replied :—

If I reduce expenses and the taxes and employ only honest officials, so that the people have food and clothing enough, this will do more to abolish robbery than the use of the severest punishments.

The annals claim that at the time of his death there were in the entire Empire only fifty men working out severe sentences and only two under sentence of death.

To the Western mind some of these Chinese sentiments seem to have the exquisite unreality that we are apt to ascribe to Chinese painting and embroidery. We are tempted to think that Tai Tsung presided over a nice little world in which nice sentiments might be indulged

without serious consequences. We do not see the full stature of the Emperor unless we remember that he ruled the largest, richest, most powerful and most populous empire in the world at the time. Its population far outnumbered that of the whole of Europe, if we exclude Russia—which was not yet civilized—and its prestige dominated almost the whole of Asia. In art and literature it was far superior to any other country. Porcelain was now invented, and vases of great beauty were added to the lovely bronzes, jades, ivories, embroideries, and lacquer work which made a rich Chinese home a house of the gods in comparison with the sombre and filthy castles which the nobles built in Europe. Art was, indeed, not, as in the Greek world—there was none in Europe—confined to the rich and noble. The shopkeeper would walk the Street of Heaven on a holiday in a jacket of black silk chastely embroidered with gold thread; his wife would walk beside him—the constriction of the feet came long afterwards, and is not Chinese—wearing a wide-sleeved silk gown over a richly embroidered vest. The three-mile-long avenue must on such occasions have presented an aspect which can no longer be seen in any part of the world.

But what most raised Chinese civilization at this time high above its only rival, the Empire of the Greeks, was its extraordinary intellectual vitality; and for the quickening of this Tai Tsung again was in large part personally responsible. His father, who had been a grave scholar—indeed, Yang Ti himself is said to have had a library of 300,000 works at a time when no library in Europe had 3,000—had founded a college at Chang-an. Shih-Min added to it 7,800 rooms for students in memory of his wife, so that it became the first university in history, “The Forest of Pencils.” It had 10,000 students, and the course of higher study for the ablest lasted more than ten years: at a time when, every manual of the history

of education shows, you could count on your fingers all the known schools in Europe, and their curriculum was elementary. The entire expense was borne by the imperial government, and the challenge to discover ability rang once more through every village of China. "Learning," the Emperor used to say, "is as necessary to a nation as water is to a fish." He had beautiful editions of the classics printed at his own expense. He said: "By using a brass mirror you can see how to adjust your hat, but by using antiquity as a mirror you can learn how to foresee the rise and fall of empires."

Tai Tsung was, however, no slave to antiquity, and he inaugurated a great age of literary creativeness. A hundred years after the Tang Dynasty had perished a collection of poems which had been published under it ran to 48,000 pieces. I say "published," because the Chinese were in regard to printing 1,000 years ahead of Europe. An American authority has said, with too large a generosity, that they had "almost everything which we have except the linotype machine." At least they had paper, which had been invented under the Han Emperors, printing from wooden blocks, printers' ink, and colour-printing. From China, through the Persians, the Western world learned both the manufacture of paper and the art of printing; just as it got from Chinese science the recipe for gunpowder and the magnetic needle. Science was almost as assiduously studied as history, poetry, and music, and many large encyclopædias stored the knowledge of the age.

In its last years the great reign was overcast, and the fine mind of the Emperor was soured. His eldest son, child of the delicate Chang Sun, was a youth of unbalanced temperament. He began to despise the "effeminacy" of the court and government and admire the ways of "the noble savage," the Turk, and the Tatar. Certain generals drew him into a plot. Shih-Min, true to his Code, would

not have him executed, but he died in prison. Not long afterwards the father died; and the annalists record, as a unique tribute to a dead monarch, how even the foreign envoys pricked their veins and shed a little of their blood upon the coffin. Li Shih-Min became Tai-Tsung, the Great Ancestor, and, after some confusion, his favourite concubine ruled the Empire in the name of her son.

Wu Chao, who seems to have been as vigorous and able as she was beautiful, sustained Tai Tsung's firm government for twenty years, but the evidence about her character is conflicting. She is accused of acts of great cruelty, though some modern Chinese writers regard the charges as libels of the Confucianists, whose philosophy she did not share. She shocked them by, among other things, starting a feminist movement—she threw the Civil Service open to women—which anticipated a modern development by thirteen centuries. In the end she drifted into fatal extravagance, and the Empire passed into a confusion which seemed to presage its end, but it was saved by another of the masterful beauties who appear so often in the Chinese annals.

Yang Kuei-Fei was the most beautiful girl in China, and she equalled any youth in her knowledge of the Classics. At the age of sixteen she was taken into the opulent harem of the Prince, with its columns of red lacquer and its crimson doors, its silk divans decorated with pearls and lace, where she continued her studies. There is a very interesting little biography of her by Mrs. Shu-Chung (1929). Three years later the Emperor's eye was drawn to her, and after spending a short interval after her divorce from the Prince in a Buddhist nunnery, as was the custom, she passed to the imperial palace and virtually ruled China until, when she was threatened by a military revolt, she hanged herself devoutly in the court of the Buddhist temple.

She was, however, no nun. She drank wine until she

became merry and danced on the table. She caroused with Li Po, one of the greatest and most drunken of Chinese poets, and she had a train of lovers; yet during the twenty years of her virtual reign China rose again to the height it had reached under Tai Tsung. Literature, philosophy, art, and trade flourished amazingly. And this beneficent reign so strengthened the foundations which Tai Tsung had laid that the Tang Dynasty lasted another century and a half.

In the ninth century, when Europe was approaching the lowest depth of its debasement, the Arab and Jewish merchants and travellers who visited China wrote their impressions in language of superlative praise. The Buddhist religion, with its 440,000 temples and 265,000 monks and nuns, was at last suppressed on civic grounds, and the country was again ruled on Confucian lines. "Justice," the visitors say, "was administered with great strictness in all courts." In case of famine or food shortage the imperial stores sold cheap food to the people as long as they had it, and there was "scarcely a single one aged or blind person" on the streets; which deeply impressed men coming from Arab and Christian cities in which beggars were as thick as flies. Villages prospered and multiplied until—believe it or not—for a stretch of hundreds of miles you could hear the cocks crow from one village to another. . . . But before the end of the century the Golden Age was over. Weak monarchs, strong concubines, and wily eunuchs brought down the great Empire; but it is pleasant to conclude that, instead of spending many centuries in a Dark Age, it passed in fifty years under the Sung Dynasty, the art and literature of which still live in the world's memory.

CHAPTER X

THE FLOWERING OF PERSIA

THE kind of history which most people read, since the works of experts are crowded with detail which obscures the human interest, treats Asiatic civilizations with supercilious ignorance. The Chinese, it represents, are a slightly inferior race who made picturesque but negligible progress in their isolation until, in the thirteenth century of the Christian Era, Marco Polo broke in upon their childlike life with news of the great civilization which the European race had created. Mr. Wells made a fine attempt in his *Outline of History* to correct this parochialism, but it still pervades our general literature. Indeed, even authoritative historians, other than specialists in Asiatic history, betray the influence of the conventional view. The finest historical work of our time, for instance, the *Cambridge History*, has, after the Fall of Rome, 1,000 pages on the miserable story of Europe for the ten which it grudgingly devotes to Asiatic countries.

The reader may therefore feel that when, in this survey of the peaks of civilized life, I pass from Europe in the days of Hadrian and do not return to it for 1,000 years, I must be under the influence of some novel or paradoxical theory. But what expert on any particular country in Europe claims for it any approach to a Golden Age during those years? What book was written between St. Augustine's *City of God*, early in the fifth century, and Dante's *Divine Comedy*, early in the fourteenth, which any but a specialist in literary history reads to-day? What picture, statue, or building do we go to admire? The light of civilization was extinguished in Europe after

the Fall of Rome. If, in fact, we honestly apply every criterion, we do not find until the nineteenth century any development of the higher social life which we may compare with that of Rome under Hadrian except in China under the Tang Emperors and in various periods of the Arab-Persian civilization. Here we will assign Golden Ages to Italy, France, and England in the resplendent days of the Renaissance, but we shall find streaks of barbarism marring the splendour of each.

During the period when Europe lingered at its lowest depth or struggled to rise from it—say, A.D. 500 to 1100—we find our historical authorities at three periods using the phrase Golden Age. The first, the reign of Tai Tsung, I have described, and the reader will not question that the title is justly awarded. The second period is that of which we have a colourful picture, which has fascinated millions of readers in East and West, in *The Arabian Nights*; and it is singular how few of these readers go on to inquire what historical truth there is in this suggestion of a world in which wealth and art were as great as they were during the Italian Renaissance, and character was in some respects higher. They would find that the historical truth is at least as attractive as the fiction. Sir Percy Sykes observes in his authoritative *History of Persia* (1921) that the reigns of Harun al-Raschid and his son Mamun are “the Golden Age of Islam,” and that the splendour “reached its zenith under Mamun,” who may be considered the hero of this chapter. Recent and critical writers like Mr. Philby (*Harun al-Rashid*; 1933) agree that this period was a Golden Age, and “the most glorious chapter of the history of Islam.”

The Persians had been the first Aryans to found a civilized kingdom, and, absorbing all the wealth and culture of Assyria, Babylonia, and Syria, it quickly became a powerful and glamorous Empire. But the wealth soon made it a debased and parasitic oriental monarchy,

and we will not speak of a Golden Age. The Greeks, and later the Romans, annexed it, and twice again it rose to a high level. When, in the seventh century, the Arabs surged over it from the deserts they seized a treasure which seems fabulous when we read the description of it in Arab writers. One room in the king's country palace, which had 22,000 servants, was so large that 40,000 columns of marble and silver-coated cedar were required to support the roof. The main palace at Ctesiphon had in its treasury millions of gold coins, and the carpet of the throne-room, which was thirty yards square, was so exquisite and so generously jewelled that when they cut it up, being unable to share it otherwise, one man's piece was worth £1,000 of modern money. In short, each of the 160,000 Arabs who had set out north, in dirty striped mantle and on a shaggy camel, took home with him £7,500 in gold coins and a rich loot in jewels, silks, comely maids, and handsome pages.

Clearly, if we regarded wealth and luxury alone, Persia had already enjoyed a Golden Age; and it is proper to add that the King Chosroes who had made it so prosperous and artistic had been no slave to sensual pleasure. In spite of his disdain of the degenerate Greek or Byzantine kingdom which bordered his own, he was assiduous in rescuing from the dust of its libraries what was left of the stimulating literature of the older Greeks and the Alexandrians and having it translated into Persian. Nobles, officials, and merchants read the works eagerly, and Greek science and philosophy inspired a keen intellectual vitality and a considerable spread of scepticism. This attempt to restore civilization in the darkening world which I described in the last chapter was checked by the depraved successors of the great king and the insolent ignorance of the first Arab governors; and the Persian scholars, disdaining these even more than the Greek Christians—"Why does their Allah like to see them

present their buttocks?" one asked, seeing them prostrate at the hour of prayer—nursed their culture in provincial mansions until the wheel turned once more.

The Caliphs, or "Successors" (of the Prophet), lived at Damascus, and, since they descended from a Mecca family which had always scorned the religious pretensions of Mohammed, they had, like Chosroes, yielded to the fascination of Greek science and art. In one or two generations they had created a notable civilization, while the descendants of the Goths and Gauls, who had not been more barbarous than the Arabs, lingered in grossness in Europe. But the open scepticism of the Caliphs and their nobles and the licence and luxury of life at Damascus roused all the fanatics of Islam, and they appealed to their leaders in Persia to head a revolt. The last degenerate descendants of the Syrian Caliphs perished in such an orgy of bloodshed as fanaticism is ever ready to inspire, but at first the Persians, who had helped to transfer the Caliphate to their country, continued to be oppressed. Fortunately the third Caliph of the new series tempered his faith with much wine and the delights of a superb harem. He summoned the leading Persians to the highest offices of State and permitted them to acquire the opulence and build the enchanting palaces which give an aspect of fairyland to the *Thousand and One Nights*. In his later years, when he mistook the vengeance of his overwrought flesh for the vengeance of Allah, he fell truculently upon the Persian unbelievers; but at his death (A.D. 786) his son, the famous Harun al-Rashid, restored their power and wealth.

Harun the Just, as the title means, is so prominent a figure in world history and so often represented as a monarch of noble and generous character, while not one in a thousand ever hears of his son Mamun, that some will wonder why this chapter is not simply entitled "Baghdad under Harun al-Rashid." I trust it will finally convince

the reader of the truth of my severe strictures on modern (non-expert) history-writing when I say that there is no recent and competent authority on Harun who does not admit that, with all his piety and his generosity in alms-giving, he was a riotous drinker (which is one of the most deadly sins in the Muslim code), a thorough sensualist, and at several periods of his life guilty of the blackest treachery and a cruelty that bordered upon sadism. His virtuous title is due to fanatical Muslim who forgot everything except his generosity to Islam and to the pilgrims to Mecca. A recent and able biographer, G. Audisio (*Harun al-Rashid*; 1931), suggests that he had incestuous relations with his own daughter, and that the most cruel act of his life was in part due to jealousy of her husband, but, while it is acknowledged that she shared his nightly orgies in the palace, this is no more than a broad inference from their characters and their companionship in debauch.

The sordid act to which I refer is widely known in an exaggerated version which has given rise to a proverb ("A Barmecide Feast"). The story is that Harun invited all the members of the noble Persian family of the Barmaki (popularly called the Barmecides) to a banquet, and had them all murdered at table. The first Persian Caliph had actually got rid of the Syrian ruling family in this way, but it is not what happened at Baghdad. The Barmaki were the leading nobles among the Persians who administered the kingdom while Harun alternated between prayer and debauch. The head of the family was Grand Vizier, and more than a score of others held high office. It must be admitted that Persian and Arab officials alike were corrupt and extortionate. The incredible wealth of the Caliphate was wrung from the people so cruelly that we must reserve the title of "most glorious chapter in the history of Islam" for the Golden Age in Spain which I describe in the next chapter.

But it was certainly not the way in which the Barmaki

got wealth for him and themselves that stirred the cold anger of the Caliph. Historians find the ground of the outrage obscure and assign many reasons which may have accumulated in his mind. He envied the power and prestige of the Barmaki; he, at the instigation of his wife, suspected that they might aim at the throne; he began to think of death and would disarm Allah by persecuting infidels; and so on. But, as all acknowledge and the facts evince, since only one member of the family is known to have been killed, the immediate excuse was the behaviour of the young Persian noble, Jafra, son of the Vizier.

Jafra, very handsome and accomplished, of sprightly wit and considerable skill in poetry and music, was Harun's most intimate friend for years. They were like brothers, and none was more appreciated in the nightly gatherings, in a secluded room of the palace, at which wine flowed copiously, poets vied with their impromptus, and humour took the salacious turn which we find in *The Arabian Nights*. At this point, it is proper to observe, some historians would dissent from the characterization of Harun which I accept. They are compelled to admit that, in defiance of the sternest precept of the Koran, he drank wine and presided at soirées, night after night, in which his favourites and courtiers drank to excess and indulged a complete licence of expression; and that his daughter Abbasa and other ladies were at the gatherings. But they resent the use of the words "orgy" and "debauch" which are suggested to us by many Arab writers of the time. I will say only that Audisio, in his richly coloured biography of the monarch, seems to hold the balance between a candour which modern historians no longer regard as a literary virtue and a too easy acceptance of picturesque gossip.

There seem to have been two sorts of evening entertainments in the palace in the centre of Baghdad. Few were

more punctilious than Harun in the performance of religious duties as long as the sun shone. He made the hundred prostrations a day which are required of the devout Muslim, gave 1,000 *dirhems* a day to the poor, and ten times made the pilgrimage to Mecca. He destroyed the temples and churches of unbelievers, and he formally addressed the exalted Greek king as "Dog of a Greek, son of an unbelieving mother." But when the sun set his guests drove to the palace in superb carriages and, after a costly banquet, they and ladies of the Court gathered round him, shining in brightly coloured silks and flashing with jewellery, for an evening of wine, song, music, and dance. He had an orchestra (flute, harp, oboe, zither, guitar, etc.) and a troupe of 300 beautiful dancing- and singing-girls whose transparent robes were lit, as they danced, by lights in the floor. But he liked better the intimate gatherings with Jafra and Abbasa and a few wits in a secluded room of the palace, where lightly-dressed and very handsome pages, the most beautiful boys in the kingdom, poured out the copious wine, and the revels often ran until the *muezzin* gave his morning call from the royal mosque.

Closest to him at every gathering were Jafra, the son of his greatly respected Vizier, and Jafra's friend the poet Ibrahim al-Mausali. In order to avert, or at least to mitigate, the scandal of having his daughter at these drinking bouts—we must certainly use that word—he married her to Jafra, but exacted a promise that there would be no conjugal relations. In the course of time she had a son, and many stories were told about the event. Most plausible is the story that Jafra's mother used to send him a few flasks of choice wine every Thursday by a beautiful girl of the harem, and one night—or on several nights—the ardent Abbasa took the girl's place. The story consistently runs that she was thickly veiled and that Jafra was stupid with wine. The child was smuggled

abroad, but a slave girl of the princess, smarting under punishment, disclosed the fact to the Caliph.

Harun is represented to us at one time as a man of fiery impulse, literally frothing at the mouth in his rage, and at others as nursing a cold anger while he thought out a ferocious punishment. He brooded for months over the disclosure, and then one night summoned Jafra from a banquet in his palace across the river and had him beheaded. The body was cut in two, and the two parts and the head were impaled on the three bridges over the river for three horrible years. Every member of the Barmaki family was imprisoned, which led to the death of the Vizier and others, and their fortunes were confiscated. Some time later Ibrahim was summoned to dine with the Caliph and was treacherously plied with wine until he mumbled something about the tragedy of his friend. He also was put to death—some writers suggest because he was the last witness to the Caliph's orgies. And, when he lay on his death-bed and a rebel leader was brought to him, Harun the Just had the man literally butchered—cut into joints by a professional butcher—before his glazed eyes, and then departed, the froth still on his lips, for the Garden of Allah.

I find it difficult, therefore, to say with grave historians that Harun's reign was half of the Golden Age of Islam; that he had "great qualities," and that, apart from some acts of revolting treachery and cruelty, his government was "wise and just." Yet it is necessary to tell of the splendour of Baghdad in his time, for it was this amazingly prosperous kingdom and a zeal for letters, science, and art that Mamun inherited. It is unfortunate that, while a hundred writers have depicted Harun and his age, there was not until a few years ago a single biography of Mamun, and the Arabic study which has recently appeared has not been translated. It is therefore the Baghdad or the Persia of Harun, further developed on some admirable lines by

Mamun, which we have to describe. Indeed, the second Persian Caliph, the builder of Baghdad, pious Muslim and foe of unbelievers and their learning as he was, had laid the foundations. The treasury which Harun had inherited is estimated to have contained £36,000,000; and we should hardly be unjust if we look chiefly to his Persian Vizier for the inspiration of the great public works and charitable institutions which appeared in his reign.

Mamun, though an admirer of Jafra, who had helped to guide his early years, had taken no part in the revels at the palace. Son of a beautiful Persian slave of his father's harem, he was born some months before the legitimate heir, Amin, but he grew steadily in the Caliph's favour, and at an early age he was appointed governor—virtually Viceroy, but with a wise old Persian statesman to guide him—of the whole vast eastern half of the realm, which stretched from Mesopotamia to Afghanistan. It is a moot question among experts whether the climate of that remarkable stretch of the earth between Syria and India, which is to-day the grave of so many cities and empires, was not more favourable in older times than it now is, but certainly in the ninth century, and much later, the region to the east of Persia, which to us presents a bleak picturesqueness, was fully civilized and prosperous. Its glorious hills, clear cool air, and sparkling waters suited the sober temperament of Mamun—Harun had changed his name from Abdulla to this, which means "The Trusted One"—and his Persian tutor sagaciously developed his high gifts. At Merv, far away from the febrile dissipations of Baghdad, he learned to esteem science and letters, and he attracted scholars to his Court. Even when he heard of the death of Harun and learned that the realm had been divided between him and his half-brother Amin, he wanted to remain in the more bracing atmosphere. But Amin, a weak voluptuary, was persuaded to conspire against him, and Mamun sent his generals to take Baghdad and make

him sole Caliph. When, however, he heard that the counsels of his tutor had led him to take steps which caused a revolt in Baghdad he transferred his Court to that city.

Baghdad was one of the most remarkable as well as, at this time, the richest and most populous city in the world. The Caliph Mansur had, in the days when the Arab domination was still threatened, chosen a site on the bank of the Tigris for a fortified capital, and the unusual character of the old, original city was thus due to military considerations. It was geometrically circular, about four miles in circumference, and had three concentric rings separated by walls. The wide space between the outermost and the middle wall was empty, except for the barracks and the movements of troops, and the citizens lived, densely packed, between the middle and the innermost wall. Four broad roads led from the gates across these quarters. The inner wall, about 2,000 yards in diameter, enclosed the palace, the royal gardens, and the public offices, but in Harun's time it had become a vast harem of women and children, the most splendid colony of beautiful women and youths in the world, under the control of a supreme eunuch. The city had soon flowed beyond the walls, and in the time of Mamun, when its population rose to 800,000, it spread along both sides of the river, which were connected by boat-bridges. The light and graceful architecture of the thousands of mansions and palaces, the beautiful gardens with their flower-bordered lakes and scented shrubs, the minarets shining white against the palms and cypresses, the ships, even from India and China, on the river, the brilliant colour of the cosmopolitan crowd. . . . But one has only to imagine an oriental city of our time expanding under such a shower of gold as no city in the world had previously known.

This revenue was, unfortunately, in very large part the fruit of gross taxation and official tyranny and corruption; though the Mesopotamian plain still bore the richest

harvests in the world, provinces which are now almost barren gave golden returns, and the immense trade spread, over good roads and bridges or by splendid fleets, from Egypt to China, from Russia to Madagascar. The story of man is now known in such detail that even experts on a particular race or century have their limitations, and we shall find that high authorities on Persian history like Sir W. Muir and Sir P. Sykes are wrong in describing this as "the most glorious chapter in the history of Islam." We shall in the next chapter find equal wealth and splendour in what is called Moorish Spain, without the grave moral blemishes of the Persian Caliphate, with a sedulous attention to the interests and education of the people, and with a more serious and fateful development of the intellectual life.

If, however, we mean by a Golden Age one of amazing wealth and artistic glamour, we do not wonder at the enthusiasm of the experts. Harun once, in setting out on a pilgrimage, gave each of his young sons 1,000,000 gold pieces; and a gold piece was in those days of more value than a pound is to us. He had a ring which was worth 100,000 gold coins. At the reception of a foreign embassy, if it did not happen to be Christian—though Harun had friendly relations with Charlemagne—the blaze under the Persian sun of gold belts and armour, of red, yellow, green, and black silks lavishly embroidered and sparkling with jewels, of richly decorated barges on the Tigris, of masses of female beauty such as one would see nowhere else, of ivory and ebony, gold and silver, silk carpets, and exquisite inlaid furniture was superb. Gobineau observes that the incredible picture offered to us in *The Arabian Nights* is "the most exact, complete, and trustworthy account of the kingdom."

The description of Mamun's marriage to the daughter of his Vizier illustrates this extravagance of wealth. It is estimated that the festivities, which lasted a fortnight,

cost the bride's father about 1,000,000 sterling. During the ceremony Mamun stood upon a mat woven from threads of pure gold, and pearls were heaped in a mound about his feet. The nuptial chamber was lit by a perfumed candle that weighed eighty pounds, and 1,000 pearls were poured upon the bridal pair from a golden tray. A banquet was given to the entire staff of the palace, including the camels and their drivers, and rich presents were made to all the men. The slaves threw upon the higher officers a shower of musk-balls, each of which contained a coupon for an estate, a beautiful maid, or a fine horse; and gold and silver coins were showered upon the lower officers and the servants.

From such wealth an exquisite art instinctively blossomed. Of sculpture and painting there could be no question, since the Koran sternly forbade the portrayal of human or animal forms; nor could men be expected in so warm and sunny a climate to build heavy stone structures like those of the Greeks and Romans. They developed the slender and graceful oriental style which will be familiar from photographs, with its elegant arches, its light columns of marble or alabaster, its mosaic floors, the cool patios with fretted colonnades encircling ever-running fountains. Every flower and scented shrub that grew in the vast dominion of the Caliph was brought to grace the spacious gardens, and in the decoration of their interior walls with moulded stucco or tasteful tiles and precious rugs and the richness of their furniture and carpets they strained after perfect beauty. I doubt if any other civilization ever expended a passion for beauty over so wide a range of what we may broadly call the furniture of life, from the slave or the wine-cup he bore to the horse, the hilt of the scimitar, or the garden, as the men and women of the Arab-Persian world devoted to their homes and palaces. The Persian carpet is still, after many centuries of degeneration, the finest of all, and the

miniature pictures on some of the surviving manuscripts of the poets are marvels of artistic patience and skill.

Above all arts were treasured those of the musician and the poet. We have to be content with the assurance of writers that music attained a fineness and subtlety which roused enthusiasm, and comparatively little of the poetry of this age has survived the fanaticism of some of its successors. We know, however—and this applies to the entire Arab-Persian world, from Turkestan to Portugal, during five or six centuries except when the devout vandals had power—that poetry and song were cultivated with the ardour which the Romans and later Greeks had given to their chariot-races and the Europeans of the Middle Ages to their grisly tournaments. There were few avenues of advancement so sure as that of the poet, and the Arabic language, which less than two centuries earlier had been the guttural speech of an almost entirely illiterate people, and the Persian became in a short time the most perfect instruments of romantic expression in all literature.

The man who knows what life was during all these centuries in the castles of the rich and noble in Europe shudders at the comparison, but even the modern, with his heavier pleasures or his Brahms and his Rachmaninov, who frowns upon this “sensuality” would learn from serious history that the Arab-Persians had already learned, as we have not, to combine artistic sensuousness with intellectual enjoyment. Naturally the great majority of the votaries of wine and song, of perfume and love, went no farther, but one of the few virtues of Harun the Just—the patronage of scholars and the translation into Persian and Arabic of Greek works—was much more eagerly cultivated in the days of Mamun. The Caliph himself was a master of mathematics and astronomy, and he established two observatories, paid out of his own treasury for translations, and sought learned men for his

Court as keenly as his father and grandfather had sought the choicest houris from the public slave-market.

The writers of the time aver that he once fought a war with the Greeks for a scholar. From a captive Greek he heard that a certain Leo was a man of marvellous learning. He had the man invited to Baghdad and, when the Byzantine Emperor refused to let him go—in fact, made it impossible by turning Leo into a bishop—he renewed the war.

Certainly one of Mamun's chief pleasures was to attract to Baghdad scholars of every branch of learning, whatever their race or religion, and spend hours in conversation with them. The output of serious literature vied with that of romantic. The world-trade brought material to geographers even from Russia and Scandinavia, and they carried their science far beyond the stage at which the Greeks had left it. History was equally cultivated, and a translation of Aristotle and other Greeks inspired a zeal for philosophy and science which, in spite of the fierce hostility of the fanatics whenever they obtained power, lasted many centuries and had a most important influence on the history of civilization. In my *Splendour of Moorish Spain* (1935) I showed that the inauguration of the era of science in Europe was almost entirely due to the work of the Arabs in Spain and Sicily. If there is one point more than another on which our historians, very few of whom ever specialize in Arab or Persian history, may be charged with docility to old prejudices, it is this question of Europe's debt to the "Moors" or "Saracens." Yet two of our leading authorities on the Persian Caliphate saw and acknowledged the truth long ago. Sir W. Muir says in *The Caliphate* (1890) :—

It was owing to the labours of these learned men that the nations of Europe, shrouded in the darkness of the Middle Ages, became again acquainted with their own

proper but forgotten patrimony of Grecian science and philosophy (p. 509).

Sir Percy Sykes writes in his *History of Persia* (1921) :—

All writers agree that for Islam this was the Golden Age of intellectual activity. The arts, literature, science, and the practice of medicine were now seriously studied and pursued with such thoroughness that through the vehicle of Arabic benighted Europe became again aware of the glorious heritage of Greek science and philosophy of which it had lost sight. All men of learning, whether Moslems, Jews, Christians, or pseudo-Sabaeans, were welcomed by the munificent Caliph, and search was diligently made for the works of the Greeks in order that they might be translated into Arabic (II, 7).

Both writers refer here to the reign of Mamun. Had their special knowledge extended to the culture of the Arabs in Spain they would have used even more positive language. Mamun, at all events, started an enthusiasm for science which lasted and increased through all the centuries of the story of the Arab-Persian civilization, and consequently the age in a most important respect ranks next to that of Alexandria.

We must not imagine that, as in our time, there was a sharp distinction between the votaries of wine and love and those of learning, or that a man was content with one branch of knowledge. Mamun set an admirable example of liberality, but the life of the greatest Persian scholar, indeed one of the two most learned men during the Middle Ages, gives us, though it belongs to the next century, the best idea of conditions in Persia. Ibn Sina—Avicenna in the debased European spelling—was born in a village near Bokhara, which is now leagues away from seats of learning. Yet in the tenth century, when Europe was at its lowest, he there found such instruction and stimulation

that he became a practising physician at the age of seventeen, mastered mathematics, astronomy, physics, philology, and music as well as medicine, read the works of Aristotle forty times, wrote on every branch of science, and was the second greatest thinker of the earlier Middle Ages. But he was, says his modern biographer, "almost as well known for his passion for wine and women," and he would close a day of arduous study by a wild carouse with the students.

It was not until a later date that the school system developed. In Mamun's time the ruling class had still no idea of educating the workers, though nearly every mosque opened a free school so that all should at least learn to read the Koran, and the many colleges which were founded in the cities extended education to wider and wider circles. On the other hand, the Caliphs spent large sums in relieving the poor and the sick. A Jewish traveller has left us a description of Baghdad from which we learn that there were "many large houses, streets, and hostelries for the sick poor." He says that the Caliph personally maintained "sixty medical storehouses," and that there was a large hospital for the insane. Great care was taken also to protect the people from fraud. The merchants formed guilds which included in their rules a promise to avoid dishonesty, and the Government maintained inspectors in the markets.

Religious toleration was one of the most conspicuous virtues of this Persian civilization. Mamun took the same pleasure in the debates of learned men in the palace as his pious father had taken in his sybaritic evenings. Atheists, Jews, and Christians were admitted to high office and invited to share in the debates on religion, the only restriction being that a man had to prove his point by reason alone. The Caliph joined the Motazila ("Seceders") sect, which roused the anger of the orthodox by denying predestination and the sacredness of the Koran.

It was, in other words, a thin mantle for Rationalism, yet some assert that Mamun at one time proposed to make it the State religion. How far his scepticism and that of his learned friends went we do not know, but it is credibly reported that when a Christian king claimed divine guidance in a letter to him, the Caliph said : "In olden times kings used to say that they always acted under instructions from the gods." A profession of Atheism in any Muslim country would have caused a rebellion, and the fashionable heresy was a kind of Pantheism based upon Aristotle's compromise between the spiritualism of Plato and the materialism of the Ionic philosophers. Probably most of them agreed in their private discussions with Ibn Sina's aphorism that the world was divided into "men who had wit and no religion and men who had religion and no wit."

It is, in fine, a very unusual merit of the Persian Golden Age that it was not, like so many of the others we describe, an ephemeral splendour that was due to the exertions of one strong man. The system of hereditary monarchy and the harem life soon brought confusion upon Persia, and the initiation of the Turks, who were increasingly brought in for military purposes, to the creed of Islam before they were properly civilized proved a terrible evil under Mamun's successors. But the appearance in provincial Persia two centuries later of the scientist-poet Omar Khayyam—with his singularly modern sentiments—and the age of the great Persian poets Sadi and Hafiz two centuries after him, bear witness to the permanence of their culture. It is even more important that, as we shall see in the next chapter, this finely blended zeal for the cultivation of mind and the more refined pleasures of sense passed to Spain and from there inspired the Troubadour movement in France which started the regeneration of Europe, and in time inaugurated the great era of science.

CHAPTER XI

ARAB SPAIN AT ITS PEAK

ABOUT the middle of the tenth century a small company of Germans conducted a monk to the Court of the Caliph Abd-er-Rahman III at Cordova. The monk brought a letter to the Caliph from the Saxon Otto, successor of Charlemagne in the title of Roman Emperor; and it had been written in such terms of studied insult to Mohammed and Islam by the Emperor's brother, the Archbishop of Cologne and the most learned prelate in Europe, that the good monk joyously expected the crown of martyrdom. The Caliph, who had a Christian bishop among his ministers and a large and happy Christian body among the million inhabitants of his capital, had heard that somewhere in this dark and barbaric world to the north of Spain there was a valiant king who fostered art and letters, and he had sent him such courteous greeting as befitted an Arab prince. This was Otto's reply.

The story of the mission would, if it had been written in full by some member of it who could use a pen, be to-day a fascinating document. Two centuries ago Voltaire wrote of the history of the (German) Roman Empire:—

This history is hardly anything else than a vast scene of weaknesses, faults, crimes, and misfortunes, among which we can see a few virtues and successes, just as one can find a few fertile valleys in a long chain of rocky hills and precipices.

This verdict is so far accepted by modern historians that our most learned and most judicious authority in this field, the late Right Hon. H. A. L. Fisher, chose it for the

motto of his work *The Mediæval Empire* (2 vols.; 1898). Some of the American historians have just discovered the "fertile valleys" and make a parade of defending the Dark Age from our libels, but it is enough here to say that, while the Court of Otto I was almost the only such valley one could find in Europe at that time, it had no more resemblance to the Court of a contemporary Arab or Persian prince than a farmhouse has to one of the stately homes of England.

Otto was boorish and illiterate, his nobles filthy, vicious, and equally illiterate, and the few foreign scholars whom his brother Bruno attracted were, Dr. Fisher says, "looked upon with jealousy and suspicion." England and France were in worse condition, and, while some culture and art lingered from Lombard days in the cities of northern Italy, Rome was at the very lowest level of its debasement. It had just passed through the thirty years of what Cardinal Baronius calls the Rule of the Whores, and a descendant of these—quite the most vicious of all the bad Popes—now scandalously bore the title of Vicar of Christ; and Emperor Otto kept the youth on the Papal throne, in spite of rape, incest, and every form of vice, because this suited his political interest. "Let the boy sow his wild oats," he said, when strict men complained.

Since we read that the Cordova Court could not get an answer to a letter from the Saxon Court in less than eighteen months, we imagine the ragged mission slowly crossing the Alps to Italy and taking ship from Genoa to Barcelona. From that point onward the monk must have felt that he was in a world of diabolical enchantment. Barcelona was on the most friendly terms with the Muslim and had to a very great extent borrowed the Arab culture. It would, doubtless chuckling at the enterprise, send the mission on in swift and comfortable carriages along the magnificent roads which the Arabs had built. The Germans would find Andalusia in those days a real garden of

song and flowers and gaiety. It had tens of thousands of prosperous villages, and the Germans would for the first time in their lives see peaches, pomegranates, strawberries, apricots, lemons, almonds, dates, oranges, and sugar-cane growing; while at the hostels they would find coffee, spinach, asparagus, the daintiest cooking, and all the spices of the East. Not an acre of ground was left untilled, and tunnels cut through mountains, aqueducts, dams, and reservoirs provided ample irrigation wherever it was needed. The land bore a larger population than it does to-day—probably larger than that of Germany, France, England, and Italy put together at that time—and an immeasurably happier and more prosperous population.

Cordova, the old packed Cordova, they would find a city of 250,000 houses and 1,000,000 people when no city in Europe outside Moorish Spain had a population of 30,000. Its massive walls had a circuit of fourteen miles and had seven large iron gates faced with brass. Its streets were paved—so soundly, indeed, that in some of them you tread the same stones to-day, just as you cross the Guadalquivir on the same noble bridge—drained by large sewers, flushed with water from the many fountains which sparkled in the sun, and lit by lamps at night. It had 80,455 shops besides 4,300 markets, and in these you could buy amber from the Baltic, Russian furs, Chinese tea, Indian spices, African ebony and ivory, and such native products in leather, metal, silk, glass, and pottery as could not be found elsewhere. It had 900 public baths—we are told that a poor Arab would go without bread rather than soap—and more than 1,000 mosques, the largest of which is still one of the architectural wonders of the world in spite of later Spanish disfigurement. Its low scarlet and gold roof, supported by 1,000 columns of marble, jasper, and porphyry, was lit by thousands of brass and silver lamps which burned perfumed oil, the largest being thirty-eight feet in circumference and contain-

ing 46,000 silver plates for reflecting the light. The exquisite Prayer-Chamber (Mihrab), the unique pulpit, and the Caliph's private section with floors of silver and gold-plated doors completed this wonderful monument of opulence and art.

But these things and the crowd that filled the narrow streets—the most cosmopolitan, most richly coloured, and most prosperous crowd that any city had ever seen—the monk must wait to see. In the way of good monks, he wore a single dirty garment and never bathed or combed his hair; and the letter he brought was grossly offensive. The Caliph, it is true, said genially, when he heard of the monk, "By Allah, I'll see him if he's dressed in a sack," and I suspect that Abd-er-Rahman would privately smile at the abuse of the Prophet, but the ministers at last prevailed upon the mission to refer back to their Court, which took eighteen months, and probably one of the many Christian churches housed them in the meantime. A milder letter at length arrived, and the monk was conducted to the palace, or the richest of the eight palaces which the Caliph had at Cordova.

Some five miles along the broad road which led to it from the city they would enter the most wonderful garden or park in the world. Engineers, who had a skill that was unequalled until modern times, so directed its water-supply that there were lakes, cascades, and superb fountains on every side, while every flower and shrub that would grow in Andalusia had been brought from the ends of the earth. At the farther side of it were the 400 white mansions of officials, visiting merchants, and distinguished travellers, and above the waving palms and dark cypresses and slender white minarets one saw, on the lower slope of the Sierra, framed by a higher slope which was entirely planted with roses, the white-marble palace of Al Zahra, the most princely monument to a beloved beauty that was ever raised. From first to last it seems to have cost

more than £30,000,000 in our money ; and the Spaniards have not left a stone upon a stone of it.

How the monk fared we do not know, except that the Caliph received him very amiably ; but we may borrow a contemporary description of the reception of an envoy from Constantinople. On the terrace of white marble were drawn up the 12,000 Slavs of the Caliph's body-guard in silk uniforms, their belts and scabbards of solid gold, the golden hilts of their scimitars glittering with precious stones. Silk awnings shut the sun from the broad marble courtyard, and the monk would surely cross himself when he entered the great hall. Its eight large doors were of scented wood and were decorated with gold, jewels, ivory, and ebony. The central dome and the ceiling were supported by columns of alabaster and rock-crystal, their capitals studded with pearls and rubies. The walls were coated with onyx and mosaics, and the ceiling and the interior of the dome were plated with gold and silver. The tapestries, curtains, and carpets, and the robes and gems in which the Caliph sat, on a throne of solid gold encrusted with jewels, may be left to the imagination.

I have fully described this "Moorish Spain," as it is unhappily called—the Moors were the African fanatics who helped to destroy it—in my *Splendour of Moorish Spain* (1935), and will confine myself here to a few points. In the first place, one must not imagine that Abd-er-Rahman III was just the fortunate heir to a wealth and art that had been growing for centuries. The Arabs who had in the seventh century passed along the north coast of Africa and crossed to Spain were, and remained for half a century, as raw as the Spaniards they conquered. Then the sole survivor of that massacre of the Syrian leaders to which I earlier referred escaped to Spain with the best ideals of his family, and by the end of the ninth century Spain had a civilization comparable with that of Mamun. But a couple of vicious and incompetent

Emirs—as the Spanish rulers at first called themselves—let ruin loose upon the splendid work, and it was a land of beggary and savagery which Abd-er-Rahman III inherited at the age of twenty-one. In the first twenty years of his long reign (912–61) he had, leading his troops in person into the most dangerous combats, so restored order and prosperity as to be able to present to the foreign envoys the glamorous scene I have described.

One strong man again, you reflect; but we must not forget that the plans, the basic institutions, and a very considerable patronage of learning and art already existed in the ruins which he took over. And, further to meet this socio-historical interest which I assume in the mind of the reader, I may say that Abd-er-Rahman III was a sceptic, a sensualist, addicted to perverse forms of vice, as well as a great soldier, great statesman, and most benevolent monarch and patron of learning.

Mockery of Mohammed was, as I said, a tradition of the Syrian Caliphs from whom he descended, but overt Atheism was a challenge to the fierce orthodox Muslim which few Caliphs were imprudent enough to profess. It is enough that wine flowed like water in his palaces and cities, and Muslim Spain was covered with vineyards. His toleration of religious differences was perfect. The Spanish Christians were, except when fanatics on either side got power, ideally friendly with the Arabs and borrowed their pretty names and customs. In fact, Abd-er-Rahman flouted Islam in one important respect: the sculpting or painting of human or animal figures. An alabaster statue of the dead girl Zahra was placed over the door of the palace he built in memory of her, and the famous metallurgical works of Cordova made wonderful figures of animals for his palace and for the fountains in the gardens. The Arab writers of the time say also that there were in the palace many paintings which defied the Koran.

But the writers, even some modern writers, who encourage the view that he was a negligible personality in history because he was a sceptic and a man who sought every form of sensual pleasure merely betray how they read history in the light of a theory instead of deriving general truths from the facts. The vast wealth of which we have had a glimpse was not extorted from a reluctant people or wrung from colonies. The main part of his income was a tenth of the income of each of his subjects, which was the lowest taxation known in the old world. In addition he had tolls on the markets, a capitation tax on Jews and Christians—who had such complete liberty and prosperity that this tax alone is said to have yielded some £3,000,000 a year—and a fifth of whatever spoil was taken in war. This revenue was collected with strict justice, the Caliph at once suppressing all corruption and extortion when he had pacified the land.

The wealth of the Caliph was, in other words, an automatic indication of the prosperity of the country. Only the lower half of Spain and Portugal was held by the Arabs—Madrid was then a wild frontier post—yet 30,000,000 people extracted from it, by a wisely directed system of industry and agriculture and a fine provision of roads, bridges, and irrigation, a wealth far greater than that which the Spaniards extract to-day; and 1,000 years ago the Spanish farmers had peaches, apricots, and a score of fruits and vegetables, in contrast to the gross food of other countries. The State had even supplied instruction on cooking and the use of condiments. It encouraged all classes in the enjoyment of music, poetry, and the dance. Slaves seem to have been few, for they are rarely mentioned, and the Arab rulers did not rely, as the Romans had done, on exploitation of either slave or foreign-subject labour. In the warmer valleys the soil yielded three crops a year. Food was cheap, abundant, and, for that age, extraordinarily varied. Along the

course of the Guadalquivir alone there were 12,000 prosperous villages. Andalusia's repute for song and gaiety belongs to those days, 1,000 years ago.

In the towns and cities—there were six besides Cordova with between 250,000 and 500,000 people—the great masses of the artisans were just as prosperous. The fame of their work in silk (which was produced in Spain), glass, porcelain, metal, leather, etc., spread over Europe and it still survives in our language (cordwain = Cordovan, morocco leather, the Toledo blade, etc.). Above this was an immense and rich middle class of shopkeepers, merchants, teachers, officials, etc. The banks of the Guadalquivir at Cordova to-day are little more attractive than the Surrey bank of the Thames. In the tenth century they were lined for many miles by 10,000 mansions and palaces, each surrounded by one of the large perfumed gardens which the Arabs loved.

A meticulous Arab writer of the time tells us that 66,300 of the 260,377 houses in Cordova belonged to men of the middle class. You can see the graceful patios of many of them as you wander round the degenerate Cordova of our time, but these wealthier folk generally lived spaciously outside the walls, in suburbs along the river to which they gave such significant names as the Vale of Paradise, the Garden of Wonders, and the Beautiful Valley. A summer night on the river, either at Cordova or Seville, when the flowers and shrubs were in perfume, the nightingales sang, the soft music rose from the innumerable gardens, would suggest such names. . . . This was just 1,000 years ago. To-day we have blasted the life out of even the drab, shrunken, impoverished remains of the noble Arab cities, and "statesmen" like Franco implore the survivors to restore the Spain of the Catholic monarchs who destroyed nearly every vestige of the happier days.

The passion for beauty entered, as in Persia—indeed

in the entire Arab-Persian world from Portugal to Baluchistan, except when the reactionaries triumphed—into the making of myriads of articles in which we to-day look only for utility. A saddle, a candlestick, a war-flag, a door-knocker, a manuscript, or a book-case might be a work of art. All these things were produced by the teeming industrial populations of Cordova, Seville, Almeria, Malaga, and other large cities, and to them were added the foreign luxuries which the Caliph's 1,000 merchant-ships, which moored at the quays of Seville, brought from all parts of the world. They sailed far down the coast of Africa and to the eastern Mediterranean. Constantinople freely exchanged artistic work, as well as the commodities which came to it from Russia and Scandinavia, with Spain, and through Egypt the Andalusians were in touch, exchanging luxuries, scholars, and books with the entire oriental Muslim world. The Caliph had no idea of aggressive conquest and left the Spanish Christians to pursue their interminable and bloody quarrels in the fringe of northern Spain where they dwelt, but through Barcelona, which was half-Arab in culture, he had an easy route for goods and ideas to southern France. Writers who speak of Provence as a second Andalusia seem to be ignorant that it was the only region into which the gaiety and culture of Andalusia freely flowed. The German mission would confirm the Arabs in their impression that the rest of Europe was a negligible barbarism.

Since the Caliph's revenue—we must not forget that it corresponds to what we call to-day the national revenue, for he maintained the army and paid for all public works—was a fixed proportion of the wealth of the workers and merchants, we see at once that the remarkable prosperity of the country was shared by the mass of the people, and every reference to them by writers of the time implies that as a body they enjoyed the happiest conditions of any

nation to that date. There is still so mischievous a reluctance to tell the truth, which from the sociological and ethical point of view is of the greatest importance, about the contrast between Arab Spain and the rest of Europe that I must make a further point.

In Spain there was little slavery, and it was of the light domestic character. The great masses of the agricultural and industrial workers were entirely free and to a very large extent educated, while in France, England, Germany, and Italy nine-tenths of the population were in effect slaves and densely ignorant. We call them serfs, but modern sociologists explain that it was a difference, for the majority, only in name. They were brutally treated and were bought and sold with the land. In Spain the workers were clean—there were innumerable and cheap public baths—light-hearted, surrounded by an environment of gaiety and beauty. At Cordova and Seville the Caliph built baths and laid out public parks and gardens for them (besides that the river with its miles of beautiful gardens was one cool glorious park), their food was as superior to that of the English or French feudal worker as that of a middle-class man now is to that of a peasant, and philanthropic institutions and homes for the poor and ailing were numerous. The counsels of the Koran to the devout here coincided with the humanitarian sentiment of the sceptics.

There was a coincidence also in regard to the education of the people. Our experts here differ, one saying that every village had a school, while another insists that we do not know what proportion of the people—though it was high—received primary education. The truth seems to be that the Caliph, which means the State, either did not, any more than other monarchs of old times (except the Roman Emperors), perceive the advantage or need of giving the rudiments of education to the mass of the people, or he saw that, in accordance with Muslim custom, this

was provided in schools connected with the mosques. One of the best Spanish authorities on the Arabs, Prof. Altamira, observes that "the majority of the Moslem could read and write," and in a special work on the subject, *La enseñanza entre los Musulmanos Españoles*, Prof. Ribera comes to the same conclusion. Mothers educated their children to the age of seven, and the father paid for the education of both boys and girls after that age. It was cheap because the Muslim regarded it as an act of piety to teach the young to read the Koran, and large numbers of men did this in return for their food or a little money.

There is no dispute, however, about the zeal for higher education or the fact that Abd-er-Rahman, by founding colleges and hostels for poor students, enabled the children of the workers to secure it. Prof. Ballesteros, another of the scholarly Spaniards who, before the shadow of Fascism fell, mastered Arabic and gave us the facts from the Arabic manuscripts which had been securely locked away in more pious days, says that this higher education was free. Generally it was, though, as in ancient Rome, brilliant teachers made large incomes by lecturing privately.

The "wandering scholars" who are so often described as a feature of French mediæval life began in Spain two centuries earlier—like most of the good features of mediæval life. Boys learned the rudiments in their villages, as they did in China, or just as the great Ibn-Sina would learn his first lessons from the village greengrocer a century later, and made for any town where there was a school of repute. "The fame of a teacher," says Prof. Ribera, "spread with a rapidity which is now hardly credible." It was just the life which so many historians imagine beginning in the days of Abelard a century and a half later. It spread to France through Barcelona and Provence. Indeed, it was shortly after the death of

Abd-er-Rahman that the only Pope in 1,000 years who had any real erudition, Gerbert, learned his science in the Arab schools; as the teachers of Roger Bacon would later do. Christian pupils of any race or age were as free as Muslim to attend the colleges. The Caliph's treasurer was a Jew—just as one of his chief diplomats was a Christian bishop—and he attracted Jewish scholars from all parts of the Muslim world until they formed a notable body of intellectuals with a literary output, in poetry, history, science, and philosophy, as well as theology, of a very high quality.

Toleration, it is hardly necessary to say, was as complete as in the Rome of Hadrian or in the China of Tai Tsung. The Jews now had their Golden Age, rising to the highest positions in the State, army, schools, and commerce. They were second only to the Arabs in the constructive work of the State and in science, and were a very material factor in creating the prosperity of the country. The shallow anti-Semitic of our time is grossly ignorant of the development of their creative ability in that age of freedom, and especially of the part they played in the spread of Arab culture over Europe. Christians, of whom there were millions in the Arab provinces of Spain, were, on payment of a small tax for protection, just as amiably tolerated; indeed, "tolerated" is too harsh a word to use to describe the average Arab's complete lack of prejudice. The zealots fumed, as they did at the quite general wine-drinking and the spread of scepticism, but Abd-er-Rahman would draw no line in regard to race or religion. M. Louis Bertrand, the French Catholic writer, amusingly claims in the egregious *History of Spain* (1934), which he wrote in collaboration with Sir Charles Petrie, that the Spanish Christians were mainly responsible for the splendour of the civilization. It is one of a hundred audacities in the book. Not only did every Spanish city sink rapidly and ignominiously when the Muslim were expelled

from it and the Jews persecuted, but of a thousand distinguished names of statesmen, soldiers, scientists, poets, and historians during the Arab period not one is Christian ; yet this and books like it are pressed upon the public as thoroughly sound, while the book in which I veraciously depicted the Spanish-Arab civilization (*The Splendour of Moorish Spain* ; 1935) was largely ignored.

The zeal for education had two important consequences. Books were now in such demand that, Prof. Ribera estimates, Cordova alone produced 70,000 to 80,000 a year, all beautifully hand-written and very often richly bound. The old parchment roll was discarded, and the manufacture of paper, which the Persians had learned from the Chinese, occupied large mills at Xativa. The Caliph had a superbly housed collection of at least 400,000—some writers say 600,000—books, in rich bookcases, and it was one of his pleasures to entertain learned men in his library and discuss the books. He spent enormous sums in bringing rare or beautiful works from the East. Courtiers and rich merchants followed his example, and libraries of 10,000 to 50,000 works were found in the mansions of the wealthy. "Even the humbler classes thirsted for books," says Ribera, and servants or ladies of the harem were of higher price if they were well-read. "The wit of the learned is as precious as the blood of the martyr," a popular proverb ran. One copying shop at Cordova employed 170 women, and women authors were highly esteemed. One reads almost daily about the monk-copyists of northern Europe, who were few in number and generally copied religious books, but never of the mighty literary output of Arab Spain at a time when no library in the rest of Europe is known to have had 1,000 volumes, and numbers of the highest nobility in Rome could not write their names (as extant legal deeds show).

Every branch of learning was not only represented but was carried to a higher level in this great Arab literature.

Most numerous were theological works on the one hand and poetical productions on the other, but the study of philosophy, mathematics, science, and history made a notable advance. Many scholars mastered three or four branches of learning and wrote several hundred books—two are credited with 1,000 works each—while others wrote immense works (on history, botany, etc.) in fifty or more volumes. Their industry was prodigious. Here, however, our information spreads over the entire Arab-Spanish period, and I must say only that the activity was at its height in the days of Abd-er-Rahman. The science which the Persians had disinterred from the dust of Greek libraries was now so thoroughly studied that its development has been almost continuous to our time. Astronomy, mathematics, optics, chemistry, medicine, and geography made rapid progress, and a beginning was made with botany, natural history, geology, and even sociology. It was from Arab Spain and Sicily, where there was later almost as splendid a civilization, that science, like music and poetry, passed to Europe and in the course of time forced the door for its modern advance.

The period I have so summarily described is, therefore, one of the finest we consider in this book (until the final chapter) in respect of the peaceful prosperity of the people, the benevolent attitude of the prince, the liberal spirit of the community, the general happiness of life in a land of sunshine and plenty, the zeal for learning and science, and, chiefly on this last account, its permanent contribution to the progress of the race. But the reader will be surprised to learn that its title to be called a Golden Age and included here will be disputed more than that of any other age. This is due in part to the general reluctance, which still influences even serious history to a surprising extent, to admit that a non-Christian people far surpassed the Christian nations in inspiration. When the Spaniards recovered their country, with the aid of the knights of

France and England, who were drawn by the rich prospect of loot, they, with more savagery than the Goths, destroyed a civilization which was fairer than that of Rome and lodged in the literary tradition of Europe a monstrously false version of their "triumph." Spanish professors of the Liberal period (1900-1923) have done much to restore the truth, but English historical literature is still in this respect deeply tainted by the old prejudice.

This reluctance takes a special form in regard to the reign of Abd-er-Rahman III, since he was, notoriously, sceptical, immoral, and materialistic; and this is true of the constructive class of his age generally. There is an amusing illustration of the distortion of judgment which this causes in one of the best works in the English language on the Arab civilization, S. P. Scott's three-volume *Moorish Empire in Europe*. He describes the achievement in more glowing language than I have used, and he then observes of the person of the Caliph that "the sensual passions of his nature bordered upon insanity, and his character was defiled by that nameless and unnatural vice." Yet no historian questions that the work was in the highest degree due to his personal contribution. "Nothing escaped that powerful and comprehensive intellect," says Dozy, the chief French authority; and our leading British authority, Mr. Stanley Lane Poole, says:—

His reign of nearly fifty years had brought about such a change in the condition of Spain as the wildest imagination can hardly conjure up.

So a thoroughly immoral ruler (in the sexual sense), but a man of great intellect and fine human and artistic ideals, created, in an age "steeped in the poison of infidelity" (Scott), one of the greatest of civilizations before our own! The moral floundering of our age will continue as long as our guides crush the historical facts into the frame of a preconceived philosophy.

CHAPTER XII

THE AGE OF LORENZO THE MAGNIFICENT

No one who is acquainted with modern critical history will ask why we find no Golden Age in Europe, apart from Arab Spain, from the reign of Hadrian until the close of the Middle Ages. Unhappily serious students of history are few, and even the liberal-minded reader will ask why I ignore the Age of Chivalry which is still so commonly appraised in our literature as a period of nobility of manhood and grace of womanhood, set in a frame of glorious art, which is unique in history.

The answer is that the literary exaltation of this period, which we count from about A.D. 1100 to about 1400, is as regards the character of princes, nobles, knights, and ladies founded upon a superstition as gross as the belief in the virtue of a horse-shoe. A summary chapter will be found in my recent *History of the Popes* (1939), and from this the reader may learn that the Age of Chivalry—the period during which the great Gothic cathedrals were built, the Guilds became powerful, the friars appeared, and wealth and art visited Europe once more—was more deeply and comprehensively corrupt than any other period of normal civilization, and that there is no dispute about this among recent European authorities on England, France, Germany, Italy, and Spain in the Middle Ages. The licence of behaviour, especially in regard to perverse forms of vice, the savage injustice of the privileged few toward the helpless majority, cruelty, banditry, and cynical bad faith were worse than in any other period of stable authority and institutions.

So much of this depravity lingered until the end of the eighteenth century that, while the omission from this gallery of the ages of Lorenzo de' Medici, Queen Elizabeth, and Louis XIV would be regarded as eccentric, the reader will, when he has read these three chapters, wonder if they are really entitled to be admitted to such high company. *Golden Ages of Art and Letters* as such do not concern us here. We seek those periods in man's history when the accumulation of wealth, from which great art and literature arise, shares its beneficence also with the people, and rulers concern themselves with the cultivation of mind and knowledge upon which the advance of the race depends.

In our age of sophistry and historical untruth it is necessary to explain why, in the common version of history, we find the men of Europe first rising to the higher stage of civilization, after the prolonged barbarism of the Middle Ages, in Italy. In point of fact, the French preceded the Italians in the return to sanity. In France the troubadours, borrowing their art from the Arabs, first sang the songs which awakened the torpid mind of Europe, the first development of a grand new architecture occurred, the schools began to attract thousands of pupils and to assume the stature of universities. What retarded the progress of France need not be discussed here. North Italy soon reached, and then outstripped it. Industry, trade, and wealth increased, with the inevitable dawn of art; towns won charters of freedom and became self-governing cities with a large middle class; a splendid *Arab civilization* in Sicily, separated from them by the morass of central Italy and Rome, was brought to them by the great *Frederic, the Wonder of the World*. The legend of Rome irradiating Italy and Europe at this time is a tale for the nursery.

To these converging stimulations of the cities of north Italy, where the fine cultural efforts of the Goths and

Lombards had never been quite forgotten, was soon added the appeal of the ancient Greek and Latin literature, as the Turks drove the Greeks and their treasures westward. The effect of this Renaissance, in the narrower sense, has been exaggerated, but it is one of the reasons why, in art and culture, Florence, the city of Petrarch, Dante, and Boccaccio, of Giotto, Leonardo, and Michael Angelo, became a queen among the splendid cities of Italy. But enough about origins and developments. Let us consider the virtues and vices of Florence in its prime.

The three brass balls over our pawnbrokers' shops are a reminiscence of the great Medici family of Florence. Their name is the Latin word for "doctors," and the founder of the fortunes of the family was a doctor who thus advertised, in an age when few could read, that he sold pills. From this business the family, in which Jewish blood is suspected, turned to money-lending—though the Church still pronounced it a grave sin—then to banking on a European scale. Their fortune became enormous, and the fingers which counted it itched for power; and, since Florence was still a free democratic city, a dictatorship had to be won by crooked means, and exercised stealthily.

Cosmo de' Medici (1389–1464) virtually founded this short and unique dynasty of citizen-dictators. A genius at financial business, he raised the fortune of his house to its height and distributed money with princely lavishness. He would one day give a hundred pounds for a beautiful Circassian maid and the next give as much to a poor priest; but usually his gifts served his thinly-cloaked ambition. He was a gentle and kindly man, the chroniclers say; yet his rivals for power fell to the assassin or were exiled by the civic authorities while Cosmo discussed high matters of art and literature with the scholars he attracted to the city and the Medici palace. His son Piero was a delicate man who would never maintain the

Medici tradition: to make the city the strongest and most prosperous in the world, to keep the control of it in the Medici family, and to restore the esteem of learning in a world in which intellect was still almost confined to monkish brooding and theological subtleties. Cosmo, leaving it to underlings to see that at any cost his power over the city was sustained, patronized artists and scholars with an imperial liberality. He accepted the dedication of Antonio Beccadelli's poem *Hermafroditus*, which is a thinly-veiled defence of unnatural vice, and he founded a Platonist Academy for the refugees from Greece and the Italians who welcomed the works they brought. And he died, deplored by his many mistresses and most of the citizens, listening in his last hour to the reading of one of Plato's *Dialogues* instead of the reading of the Bible.

In this broad and elegant faith he had his robust and promising grandson Lorenzo educated. Marsilio Ficino, more spiritual than his master Plato, a very grave young scholar with smooth, long, pale face, taught him mystic philosophy. The best scholars in Italy attended to the rest of his education, and he had still better tuition in fencing, equestrian sports, and all the arts of a gentleman. They made him sound in mind and body, a fair poet, a hard rider, and in diplomacy the equal of the most cunning and most unscrupulous prince of this age of Machiavelli. His admiring modern biographer Horsburgh, who at times strains the evidence in his favour, admits that the Medici methods were "corrupt and unscrupulous." But we will not quarrel with him for preferring bloodless deception to the bloody treachery which was then as common in Italy as fine art. When his grandfather died one of his leading statesmen made a plot to murder Lorenzo's invalid father Piero, if not all the Medici family, and seize power; and this Pitti conspiracy was mild and gentlemanly in comparison with one which we shall consider later.

Lorenzo, who was then a gay youth of seventeen, in the first flush of princely indulgence, began to study the art of governing in a world of unbridled passion; and he adopted the family tradition that *Panem et Circenses* for the crowd, whose knives and axes were usually the final tribunal in a civil war, was the chief maxim. He had not the bluster and the “inflexible will” of the modern dictator, but he had many ducats. He became Lorenzo the Magnificent before he was out of his teens. Biographers say that he ruled Florence, apart from the weekly shows and his gifts to the people, by personal charm or fascination. He was rather ugly and loose-limbed, his long, thin nose ending in a flattened tip, his pale cheeks hollow and furrowed, but he compensated for this by the dignity of his bearing, the splendour of his person, and a nicely calculated affability.

We must, however, read with reserve the assurance of his biographers, who are as uncritical as those of Louis XIV—and of rulers generally—that Florence was devoted to him. His structure of power collapsed after his death, and when the city presently expelled the Medici, the authorities set up in front of the Palazzo della Signoria (or Town Hall) Donatello’s grim bronze of Judith flourishing the head of Holofernes and affixed to it the Latin motto: “The citizens put this here as an example of public spirit.” Burckhardt, the chief authority on the Renaissance, tells us that “tyrannicide was a practice universally approved and accepted in Florence,” and that Brutus was a popular hero. We may feel ourselves to be in an atmosphere which is less pleasant than that of the other Golden Ages we have admired, but at least it was no worse in Florence than in other Italian cities. There were few princes in Italy who did not live in daily dread of murderers. At this period, indeed, these began to be called, if they merely sought the life of ruling men, by the politer name of assassins.

To this we will return later. It is more pleasant to dwell first on the virtues of the Golden Age of Florence. Let us understand that we no longer study a kingdom or an empire. Florence was a relatively small and very compact city, with a very precarious authority over two or three neighbouring cities and the intermediate country. About 90,000 men, women, and children were packed within the circle of its grisly old walls, which could tell many a tale of horror. But the limpid Arno wound through the city, which was set like a jewel in a circle of softly-rounded green hills, their vineyards and olive groves moderating the glare of the summer sun. As most people know, it had been a bright (except for the periodic blood-letting of Guelphs and Ghibellines), thriving, and not unlearned city in the days of Dante, a century and a half earlier. Now it was superbly enriched with bronzes and marble statues, paintings and noble buildings. One feels, as one stands in the Piazza della Signoria to-day, that one is in a world-shrine of art. There is, perhaps, nothing in Italy more exquisite than Ghiberti's bronzes on the doors of the Baptistry.

Especially on Sundays and festivals, the crowds on its streets, the chief of which were paved long before those of Paris or Rome were, advertised the wealth and reflected the feeling for beauty of the more comfortable citizens. Probably the reader has seen plenty of Italian paintings and does not need to hear of the silks and satins, velvets and brocades, the curling plumes and embroidered vests and mantles, the gold and silver cloth, gold chains, and heavy jewellery which, as in the first flush of wealth of every new civilization, responded to the brilliance of the sun. We have a description of the procession in honour of Lorenzo's betrothal at the age of twenty to a fifteen-year-old daughter of the great house of the Orsini. His younger and more handsome brother Giuliano, preceded by nine trumpeters and four pages on Arab horses, led the

procession, wearing a mantle of silver brocade over a silk vest heavily embroidered with pearls and silver, three feathers in his bonnet of black velvet adorned with pearls and rubies. His outfit cost, in modern money, about £20,000. Lorenzo wore a tunic of red and white silk, the Medici colours, decorated with a marvellous design in pearls, diamonds, and rubies; and when he entered the lists in the tourney he wore a helmet inlaid with silver and had in the centre of his shield the great Medici diamond, which is said to have been worth £5,000. The sun was brilliant, for it was February and an Italian spring, and one can imagine the crowd of magnificently dressed burghers and noble guests, the houses gay with flowers and choice tapestries. . . . The people, as a whole, loved Lorenzo as long as this lasted.

For this wealth of Florence the Medici were in large part responsible, but these glamorous displays must not mislead us. Burckhardt tells us that the fortune left by each of the greater Medici was in the neighbourhood of 250,000 ducats; in other words, translating this into modern values, two or three of them reached the million-sterling mark, but they must not be compared to modern multi-millionaires. They had, however, all been lavish spenders. In thirty years they spent (in modern money) more than £3,000,000 in taxes, public works, and beneficence. And they were not the only rich bankers. A century earlier two banking houses had lent our Edward III £700,000; and they had lost it, yet recovered.

Apart from these banking fortunes Florence enjoyed a solid prosperity based upon sound trade and industry. After our description of the Arab cities of Spain it does not impress us to read the Florentine historian boasting how his city had 270 wool-factories, eighty-three for weaving silks and brocades, eighty-four for fine cabinet work, and so on. But most of those Spanish cities were

now melancholy ruins surmounted by a cross, and Florence was the richest city in Europe. Its merchants and manufacturers are said to have been more soberly industrious than those of other Italian cities; and, as to Rome, it was not many years since visitors had seen cows and sheep nibbling the grass in its streets and churches and wolves digging up corpses in winter on the slopes of the Vatican. There are wills of this date in which Florentine merchants beg the civic authorities to fine their sons 1,000 ducats if they do not continue in the trade or profession for which they were educated.

Golden the little city assuredly was in its wealth and art, as well as in its glorious countryside, but it has a better title to be included in our list. The term Renaissance (Rebirth) originally referred to the recovery in Europe of the Greek and Latin classics. We use the word more broadly to-day, meaning the slow restoration of civilization which had begun, under Arab influence, in southern France in the second half of the eleventh century. The recovery of classical literature was, however, one element of this.

Some may be surprised at the very word recovery or rebirth when they still read repeatedly how "the monks preserved the classics." It is a tattered fiction, but here is no place to discuss it. In brief, Italian scholars had for more than a century grubbed in the rubbish of monastic libraries in various parts of Europe where some genial abbot or bishop, rising above both the vice and the virtue of his age, had borrowed and copied an ancient Latin work—none of them knew Greek—and the copy had escaped the monks' practice of washing off the ink so that they might use the parchment to copy the life of a saint or a drinking song. The Medici contributed large sums for this work and got together the remnant of Latin literature which we have to-day. The advance of the Turks upon Constantinople sent numbers of Greek scholars

and artists to Italy, and the palace of the Medici became the first great centre of Greek studies.

The conventional estimate of the influence of this recovery of classical literature is as inaccurate as most other historical traditions of our superficial literature. For centuries the new fervour for classical studies was to be a very serious hindrance to the far more important cultivation of science in the universities; and in the fifteenth century itself classical scholarship was confined to a few and had little influence on the vast majority of rulers and the general life of the people. We can say only that the sociological ideas of one or two of Plato's *Dialogues* and the patriotic ideas of the old Roman Republic counted for something. But to these the great majority of the Humanists were blind. Some of them, especially at Florence, developed the mystic philosophy of Plato—they celebrated his supposed birthday and burned lamps before busts of him—which embodies a fundamental view of reality that is totally inconsistent with science, radically false, and socially uninspiring. Others found in the more frivolous classical literature a confirmation of their freedom of conduct—it is grotesque of Catholic writers to suggest that the Middle Ages *learned* vice from it—and passed on to the artists of the time the inspiration which makes mediæval painting and sculpture so amiable a blend of Venuses and Virgins. When Pope Eugenius at last opened the era of art in Rome he sent for a Florentine artist to make a bronze gate for St. Peter's which should rival the exquisite gates of the Baptistry at Florence. When the man had finished the work, the Pope found that among the small figures were Jupiter and a nearly naked Ganymede, a centaur courting a nymph, and a representation of the episode of Leda.

Broadly speaking, and recalling the fine service of such Humanists as Erasmus and Montaigne, the classical Renaissance brought into Europe an element which re-

buked the lingering brutality of the age, helped to divert the mind from the barren fields of Scholastic theology, and taught an ever-widening circle of nobles and middle-class men the pleasure of mental exercise. For this Cosmo and Lorenzo are entitled to gratitude. Interest in literature rippled out from the Medici Palace and the Platonist Academy over the region. The Florentine historian Vilani would have us believe that even the donkey-drivers quoted Dante, and that there were 8,000 to 10,000 children in the schools of the city. If this is true—and we must admit a large element of truth in it—the zeal for education was a very ephemeral passion. Two centuries later not one person in ten in Italy, apart from the clergy, could read.

The extravagant praise which biographers give to the cult of Plato in particular must be read with reserve. They say that Lorenzo paid more attention to the ideas than to the style of the great Athenian, and that he declared that “without a knowledge of the teaching of Plato it is impossible to be a good citizen and not easy to follow the Christian doctrine.” We may reflect that Lorenzo’s idea of ruling the workers by a magnificent use of his own wealth and luxury is very far from the ideal of Plato’s Republic, and that his personal life was just as far removed from the master’s spiritual teaching. No one questions that he was very immoral, roaming at will among the married women as well as the unmarried girls of the city. Few writers fail to quote the admirable letter which he wrote for his son Giovanni when he set out for Rome to receive the cardinal’s hat which the Pope had promised him. Horsburgh, whose biography of Lorenzo is perhaps our standard authority, quotes its moving exhortations to virtue—Lorenzo tells his son that he is going to “the most vicious city in the world,” and must not yield to its temptations—and adds that Lorenzo had carefully supervised his son’s education with a view to putting him in the Church.

Since Horsburgh admits that all the men of Florence, including Lorenzo, had mistresses as well as wives, and the mistress was usually another man's wife, we wonder. But we should hardly even wonder if the biographer had candidly told that the whole aim was political, because for years the Papacy had been at bitter and murderous feud with Lorenzo; that Lorenzo's real regard for the clerical state was such that he had Giovanni admitted to it at the age of seven and forced the Pope to promote him to the cardinalate at the age of fourteen; that as part of this policy he had his daughter Maddalena married to the Pope's illegitimate son Franceschetto, one of the most notorious rakes in Rome, in the Vatican; and that Giovanni later became Pope Leo X, one of the most scandalous Popes of that era of Papal debasement. I should add that these are not facts which even an apologist for the Popes disputes, and that the Pope who admitted the boy to the corrupt college of cardinals at the age of fourteen is counted one of the "good Popes."

In other words, our Golden Age falls in an era of such open licence of conduct as had rarely, if ever, been seen before in a period of high civilization. This does not properly concern me, but when Lorenzo's biographer says that Florence was at least almost free from the more perverse form of vice one has to demur. Voigt, the biographer of Pope Pius II and one of the chief authorities on these matters, quoted long ago a decree of the Florentine Council of Ten of the year 1454, which begins:—

Since it is most clearly understood how greatly the abominable and detestable vice of sodomy is multiplying among us . . .

About this time, as I said, Cosmo de' Medici accepted the dedication of Beccadelli's *Hermafroditus*, the title of which is enough; and Aretino, another writer of the school, was a Chancellor of Florence. Another Chancellor

(after service in the Vatican) was Poggio Bracciolini, who wrote a book of indecent stories and jokes in Latin of such a character that it was never translated even into French. Filelfo, whose satires J. A. Symonds pronounces "the most nauseous compositions that coarse spite and filthy fancy ever spawned"—the Pope awarded them a rich prize—also was a Florentine official. Through the fearful invectives of Savonarola, who became prominent in the later years of Lorenzo, the morals (particularly unnatural vice) of Florence are well known, and the Catholic historian Dr. Pastor admits the heaviest indictments in his *History of the Popes*.

The Catholic historian thinks that he can afford to be candid, because he attributes all the vice to the rebirth of classical literature. His learned studies begin only in the fifteenth century, or he would know that the extraordinary openness of vice had lasted since the eleventh century. The only difference in Florence in the fifteenth century was that parents no longer allowed their daughters the wild licence they had had in the Age of Chivalry. The freedom of wives persisted, and in the rank of ruling nobles many of them were still as hard and truculent as the men. "Virago" was not in those days a term of reproach. It is, in fact, precisely here that we encounter the feature of life which makes us hesitate to admit the Florence of the Medici or any Italian city of Renaissance days, in spite of the superb development of art, among the Golden Ages of history.

Dr. Pastor, whose volumes on this phase blush with shame, says that "of all the evils which darken Italian life at this period the deadliest was the prevailing immorality"; that "almost all the Italian princes of the age of the Renaissance were steeped in vice"; and that "revolting excesses were common." In view of the general profession of the Christian faith, if not of the austere ideals of Plato, we understand the Catholic writer's

indignation. But the modern student may find something wrong with his moral scales when he adds that "cruelty and vindictiveness went hand in hand with immorality," and that the history of the time is "an appalling tissue of malignity, profligacy, and savage brutality." The reader who knows the age only by its marvellous art and beautiful cathedrals will wonder if this verdict of the leading Catholic historian is not unjust. It is literally just and correct. From the beginning of the Renaissance (in the broader sense) in the eleventh century Europe had witnessed such cruelty, vindictiveness, brutality, and glorification of bad faith as we cannot find in the normal history of any other civilization. The savage banditry of the knights (and often of their ladies), the treatment of captured cities and even of Rome (in 1527), the fiendish nature of the tortures, and the brutal injustice to the mass of the people, as described in all authorities, are revolting.

Lorenzo was in this respect better than most of the rulers of his time, but what happened in Florence in 1478 casts a shadow upon its Golden Age and is an appalling exhibition of Italian character. The bitter feud of Florence with the Papacy need not be described here. The Pope, Sixtus IV, left it to his nephew, Cardinal Riario, to conduct it, and it is an open question how far the Pope knew the details of the plot to murder the Medici to which his nephew resorted when his diplomacy failed. The rival banking family of the Pazzi and the Archbishop of Pisa were drawn into it, and, after several futile attempts to lure Lorenzo and his brother Giuliano to a banquet at which they were to be murdered, they fixed the crime for the most solemn moment of High Mass on Ascension Day in the cathedral of Florence. Two priests led the assassins. Giuliano was murdered in the sanctuary and Lorenzo wounded. One account describes Lorenzo, armed with a spit from the kitchen, holding a narrow staircase in the palace against a troop of murderers led by the archbishop.

But the biographers and historians are less candid when they describe the reaction of the Florentines. They, the Pope said in a letter, " behaved like mad dogs." They hanged the archbishop and savagely cut down eighty-three men and women who had supported him and the Pazzi. They dragged the bodies through the streets, as was often done in the beautiful Italy of Renaissance days, then cut them up and bore the pieces on lances. Boys were permitted to dig up bodies and, amidst their laughing elders, trail them in the dust. There were worse times, when the people cooked and ate the bodies of their victims—a practice still seen in Naples more than three centuries later. So, while we recognize the golden glory of Florence and acknowledge our debt to the intellectual activity which distinguished it above every other city in Italy, we sigh for the more genial atmosphere of the capital of Nebuchadrezzar or of Ptolemy, of Asoka or of Hadrian, of Tai Tsung or of Abd-er-Rahman.

CHAPTER XIII

ELIZABETHAN ENGLAND

IT is hardly likely that anyone will question my selection of the reign of Elizabeth as England's Golden Age. The achievements of King Alfred, of which we used to boast, are almost as legendary as the enterprises of King Arthur and his knights; and the age of Edward I had all the vices without the redeeming art of mediæval Italy. The glorious thirteenth century of our Bellocs and Chestertons culminated at Rome in the pontificate of Boniface VIII, whose memory was charged by the Church with every conceivable vice, and in England with the sordid reign of Edward II and Isabella. Does any ancient civilization offer us a scene like that which was witnessed at Hereford in 1327, when a queen more vicious than Messalina, a large body of the fine ladies and maids of her Court, and the men, women, and children of the town looked on with enthusiasm while the king's favourite noble was castrated, and then savagely butchered, on a scaffold in the market-place? The strain and demoralization of the Hundred Years' War with France followed, and after that came the long-drawn ferocity of the Wars of the Roses. England reached the end of the Middle Ages "lean, rent, and beggared by the wanton wind."

The reigns of Henry VII and Henry VIII were a period of slow recovery hampered by economic ignorance and a premature extravagance and encouragement of ignoble greed; and even this recovery was for the most part lost in the reigns of Edward VI and Mary, which loosed once more the dark flood of distress and confusion. We flatter "our Catholic fellow citizens"—which means that

we yield to the intrigue of their priests—by teaching our children that the “brutal lust” of Henry VIII and the cupidity of his courtiers deprived the poor of the relief which the pious monks had given them. Granting that large numbers of folk had earned their living by loafing about the back gate of a monastery until the bell rang for a free meal, as one may see in parts of Ireland to-day, we might nevertheless include in our history lessons such facts as that the royal expenditure, which was £56,000 in the last sumptuous year of Henry VIII and £60,000 in the last year of the sober Edward VI, rose to £500,000 in the last year of the ascetic Mary, though she left an empty treasury and a mountain of debt; and that, while there had been only about fifty executions on religious grounds during the century and a half before Mary’s accession, there were about 300 during the five years of her ignoble reign. But it is now a symptom of bad taste and an illiberal mind to call her Bloody Mary and seek to blame her for the gaunt poverty and civic hatreds which the wicked Reformers had inflicted upon the country.

These things must be said if, as in the preceding chapters, we would detect the creative causes of the Golden Age which all historians recognize in the reign of Elizabeth. And let us again be candid in our search. In Traill’s excellent *Social History of England* Miss Bateson blushes for the “sensuality” and “moral corruption” of the age of Henry VIII, but she concludes that it cannot have been “wholly debauched” because its statesmen, merchants, scholars, and explorers did at least lay the foundations of the Elizabethan Golden Age. A simple mind would conclude rather that sensuality seems to be compatible with constructiveness; and we shall assuredly not find the age of Elizabeth less sensual or more virtuous than that of Henry, while the puritanical age of Mary constructed nothing.

For the rapid advance of England in the days of

Elizabeth many reasons have been learnedly assigned. Some quote the Copernican Revolution or the discovery of the universe; whereas, not only did the soundest thinker of the age, Bacon, reject it, but probably hardly one in a hundred even of the creative men ever heard of it. It is almost as academic to quote the invention of printing, which had occurred more than a century earlier, or the Renaissance of classical literature, which was cherished by a small and estimable but not broadly influential group of scholars. Our manuals are too apt in their cold enumeration of causes to make these things seem equal in importance to the discovery of America, or that magnificent bursting of the shell of England's insularity and discovery of the earth which *was* one of the chief inspirations of the age.

Nor must we be tempted by the conventional sort of history-writing to attribute too large a share to Elizabeth herself. One of the novel features of the literary deluge of modern times is the very prolific production of biographies of "great" or picturesque or wicked historical personalities by writers who are not historians. Such works sustain the fiction of the personal greatness of Elizabeth or Louis XIV and a hundred others. Our *Dictionary of National Biography*, which, in spite of its high standard of scholarship, rarely forgets how very important it is that we shall think well of kings and queens, concludes that Elizabeth was one of the great personages of history, but naively adds that she was "a woman who by sheer force of character gained for herself the credit of all the grand achievements which her people effected in peace or war." To be quite just to Elizabeth, historians and biographers awarded the credit to her.

Elizabeth is distinctive among the sovereigns who are described in this work in that she had all the strength of mind and body which is required in a maker of a Golden Age and a sincere desire to make her country prosperous,

peaceful, and powerful; yet it is clear that the Elizabethan age would have been great without its Elizabeth. And, while our science now gives us a plain clue to the mystery of her character, I know no historical writer who has followed it. Historians continue to discuss whether she was or was not a virgin, could or could not bear children—there is good evidence that her intimates held that she could not—and so on. We now know that each human being has the potentiality of developing male characteristics and, while this development is in the female inhibited by the action of certain glands, these glands may, like any other organ, be feeble or abnormal, and this may permit the appearance in varying degrees of masculine growths. The women are generally homosexual, though this is not said of Elizabeth, and shrink from men.

Elizabeth's mannish peculiarities and aversion from marriage clearly put her in this category. In youth she seems to have been beautiful and normal, if rather hoydenish, but she became stronger and coarser with age. She rode as hard and swore as sonorously as a man. I have a copy of a booklet which was printed privately in America and is said to have been written by Mark Twain that gives an imaginary conversation between the Queen, Raleigh, Ben Jonson, Shakespeare, and several ladies of the Court. We will trust that the language was not so bad as that, but it was gross. She would slap a noble's or a lady's face, spit on a man's coat if it were not to her taste in dress (which was execrable), and display a ferocious temper. Read about the savagery which she ordered in the execution of Babington and, especially, of John Stubbs (who had criticized her chances of marriage). She spoke Latin fluently, but never read the Latin poets. She took no interest in what we regard as the richest jewel of her age, its literary brilliance, or in learning. "She never threw a bone to a hungry poet or scholar," says one historian. She had no feminine

delicacy of taste in dress and overdid her part in this respect.

While, therefore, it was really fortunate for England to have a Virgin Queen of her type—a woman who, while she sought and achieved peace, had the strength to despise the religious quarrel which paralysed Europe and to put her pride in the growing prosperity and prestige of her country at the crisis of its fortunes—it would under any but another Mary have risen to a great height. I have sometimes, especially in America, invited critics of England to look at it on a map of the world, on which it is a mere pin's head of red paint, and then reflect upon its place in history and contemporary life. This distinction it began to attain in the reign of Elizabeth.

Until that time it had been a foggy island off the coast of Europe, which was dominated by the Empire and the Papacy. Now it thumbed its nose at both powers and found to its surprise, when the Armada was scattered, that it might do so with impunity. It had been a large, rudely-worked farm, with a few market-ports on its east coast for the superior products and luxuries of the Continent. Now it opened doors upon a larger world all round its shores and discovered the wealth of its vast oak-forests and iron-beds. It saw the splendour of Italy, which had awed it, rapidly overcast by the advance of the Turks, which destroyed Italian commerce, and the reform of religion, which diverted a stream of gold. It saw the trade of its nearest neighbours, especially Antwerp, ravaged by the fanatical Spaniards, and the ephemeral brilliance of Spain itself ruined by its priest-ridden monarchs. It saw France failing, in the paralysis of its incessant religious wars, to seize the splendid new opportunity that was afforded to the Western peoples by the transfer of shipping from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic. Ruined abbeys reminded folk everywhere of a sudden release from an age-old tyranny and exploitation.

Deserted castles, their grim pride lowered by the new artillery, told of another tyranny that was dead. The call to arms no longer ravished their homes every few years. Streams of Flemish and French refugees with new industries poured over the country, and bronzed sailors told entrancing tales of voyages from the Arctic to the Cape of Good Hope and the Straits of Magellan. . . . What nation could have resisted the stirring impulse to rise and strive after greatness?

And, when we patiently examine it, we find no miracle in the Elizabethan advance. It does not, when we apply all our standards, reach the level of the achievement of Athens under Pericles, Alexandria under Ptolemy II, Rome under Hadrian, China under Tai Tsung, or Spain under Abd-er-Rahman III. Set aside Shakespeare, the Armada, and the great explorers, and the gold seems very pale, while the ugly streaks are broad and numerous. Nothing was done for the mass of the people; the enslavement of Africans, under very brutal conditions, began; the law sanctioned barbaric punishments; city streets were foul, most homes sordid, and disease rampant; morals and taste were extraordinarily low; few were educated; great progress was made only in one art and, apart from one genius, even this was defective; science was still almost totally neglected.

The basic feature was, as usual, the increase of prosperity. The kingdom had the advantage of possessing the best financial expert in Europe, Sir Thomas Gresham, and he at once undertook the rescue of the coinage from the debasement of the two previous reigns. With sound money and the destruction of the Antwerp market, foreign trade expanded, and industry advanced proportionately. Tens of thousands of refugees from Catholic persecution in the Low Countries and France with their superior skill and sober habits settled in the south-east and the midlands and helped to enrich the

land. The new demand for food raised the incomes of the landowners and the more substantial farmers. A score of cities in the southern half of England were flushed with prosperity, and London and Westminster began to present those colourful and glamorous scenes which are to the superficial mind more than half the glitter of the Golden Age.

How the bankers and merchants blundered into the Mercantile Policy, imagining that the economic ideal was to bring only gold and silver into England, as far as possible, in payment of the goods exported, does not concern us, but let me explain the hard saying that "nothing was done for the mass of the people"; especially since most people know that our Poor Laws, enjoining Justices to seek out the genuinely distressed and give them relief, began in Elizabeth's reign. Whether the harsh treatment of all whom the justices did *not* consider genuinely distressed was an affliction we need not ask. The main point is that the overwhelming mass of the nation not only had no share of the new prosperity but fared worse than they had fared in pre-Elizabethan days, except that they had, perhaps, more regularity of employment.

The expert writers of Traill's *Social History of England* (Vol. III) say repeatedly that the new wealth was shared only by the upper and middle classes. This implies no melodramatic antithesis of Capital and Labour, though, naturally, the capitalist or industrial era now opened with the concentration of wealth, the expansion of industry and trade, and the final repudiation of the Papal dogma that to lend money at interest was the grave sin of usury. The plain fact is that while the prices of commodities generally rose by fifty per cent.—the price of wheat, the main food of the people, was doubled—wages did not rise. The artisan continued to get ninepence a day—in a few cases a fraction of a penny more—and the agricultural worker sevenpence. Their real wage was therefore greatly

reduced under Elizabeth. The Justices (who were employers) fixed wages and were stern against rebels. The very laws which made industry and trade more profitable hurt the workers, who were at least four-fifths of the nation. Historians tell how, when the Commons, which towards the end of her reign began to show the spirit of independence that would culminate in the Civil War, complained to the Queen of her granting of trade monopolies, she promised reform, saying that she approached the judgment-seat of God and thought daily of it. "You have had," she went on, "and may have, many princes more mighty and wise sitting on this seat, yet you never had, or ever shall have, one that will love you better." It looks pretty in a biography; but, says the economic historian, she did *not* reform. She had got the money she wanted.

The statement that great progress was made in only one art, and that only one man in it approached perfection, hardly needs explanation. We have in most chapters found that a considerable increase of wealth, especially when it is associated with a new or enhanced national spirit, leads to a general efflorescence of the arts. In Elizabethan England painting and sculpture remained without inspiration; music and architecture made no revolutionary advance upon the earlier reigns. It is literature we have in mind when we speak of Elizabethan brilliance. Critics count Spenser's *Faerie Queen* the second (after Chaucer) great poem in the English language, and Shakespeare is a genius transcending all limitations of time or race. The experts put Marlowe next, yet so weighty a critic as Saintsbury says that his plays have "every fault that a play can have except tameness." That was the note: fire, strength, expressiveness, red-bloodedness. England's artistic flowering was not, as such flowering had been in other Golden Ages, the sensuous manifestation of a new wealth. The Queen was indifferent to it; the merchants and bankers did not, as they had done in China

or Arab Spain, waste their gold upon books. The Elizabethan literature, of superb strength in its prose and inspiration in its poetry, was the voice of the new national mood of vigour, confidence, pride, even boastful arrogance.

And this mood or spirit was in large part—one wonders if one ought not to say the largest part—engendered by the heroic work of the travellers and explorers. It is sometimes called “the expansion of England.” We appreciate its importance better if we think of it as the expansion of the English mind; though the settlement in America did mean that England started, modestly, to expand into a colonial empire. What mattered most was that for hundreds of thousands of Englishmen the mental horizon broadened amazingly. A few great captains and a few thousand sailors did the work, but the stories they brought back thrilled the ports and the capital and rumbled over the countryside: stories of Greenland and Norway, of strange African scenes and thousands of miles of ocean, of the golden domes of Moscow and the spice-islands of the Indian Ocean. The Turk straddled the old route to the rich and fascinating East, and the Pope had divided America between Spain and Portugal. A fig for the Pope; but Spain was still mighty, in spite of its creeping sickness, and meantime, until the Armada betrayed its disease, English mariners tried a North-west Passage and a North-east Passage to India and China, and they at least discovered the gates of Russia, which liked the Pope no more than they did, and opened up a new wing of the world. Some Englishmen—for there were great travellers as well as great navigators—pushed eastward from Moscow as far as Bactria. Others reached the ruins of Babylon.

This picture, too, has a seamy side—piracy and the sale of Africans into slavery. The general moral standard was appalling. Captains who rebuked their men for lechery and cursing applauded their savagery to Papists and

pagans. Sir John Hawkins was so religious that he gave the name of "Jesus" to the ship in the hold of which the blacks he kidnapped from Africa endured such bestial conditions that half of them died; and Elizabeth shared the profit of selling the remainder into slavery. Polite folk explained that these blacks were criminals whom the chiefs would otherwise have put to death, and theologians argued that at least they became Christians in America. No one stirred until Wilberforce, two and a half centuries later, learned moral indignation from the French sceptics he affected in his youth. Piracy involved even more English gentlemen. "That English gentlemen of good birth and high character rushed into the profession of piracy is one of the most characteristic facts of the Elizabethan age," says Traill's *Social History*. In the fifteenth year of Elizabeth's reign her navy counted 146 ships. It owned only thirteen. The remainder were privately-owned traders and pirates. And if any man does not know the savagery with which they fought and the foulness of life at sea and in port I do not care to enlighten him.

In most of the Golden Ages we have studied we have found it difficult to learn the truth about the average moral character or to find any evidence that the majority of folk were less honest, truthful, sober, and kindly than they are now. We have to confine ourselves to the consideration of sexual conduct and standards; though, since it is to this that moralists almost always refer when they connect the rise of civilization with virtue and its fall with vice, we did not waste our time. For the English Golden Age we have ample evidence that the general moral standard was low and average conduct even below the standard. That four-fifths of the nation should be forced into greater poverty in a time of rapidly increasing wealth is deplorable enough, but there are many more explicit indications: the profiteering in piracy and the

slave trade, the insensitiveness to the publicly exhibited savagery of legal sentences, the occasional grave scandals in high official or court life, the ready recourse to violence and murder, the general grossness of language, and so on. Of the sexual licence in particular it is surely not necessary to speak.

If any reader is tempted to connect this with the change of religion, let me recommend the reading of three books: (1) Archdeacon Hale's *Precedents and Proceedings in Criminal Cases* (1847), which gives (if the reader can master a jumble of dog-Latin and Rabelaisian English) an incredible picture of clerical vice and grossness in London just before the Reformation; (2) Dr. F. J. Furnivall's *Child-Marriages* (1897), which shows that the Protestant clergy continued to marry children from the age of five upward, so that all must have been as familiar with the facts of sex-life as a boy in one of our worst slums is to-day; (3) Philip Stubbes's *Anatomy of the Abuses in England* (Dr. Furnivall's edition, 1877), the editorial notes to which show that this extraordinary picture by a contemporary of the morals of all classes under Elizabeth is generally accurate. "The old Church left a legacy of abounding immorality," says Traill's *Social History*. I have given a mass of detail in other works. Preachers think it indelicate to write or read these things to-day; and they then lament the frightful increase of vice in our age of rebellion and desiderate a return to the Ages of Faith.

Some, in fine, ask if there was not in Elizabeth's time a growth of scepticism, and if the evil conduct might not be traced to this. It is a pity that humour is excluded from these high debates. We are, in the first place, not explaining a national *decay* during Elizabeth's reign but a remarkable *advance*; and, in the second place, not a single feature of grossness in the period *was* new or *was* worse than it had been. So I will not linger here over this question of religion. For the overwhelming majority of

the people the change of religion was superficial. The aisles of St. Paul's Cathedral (St. Paul's Walk) had been, in Catholic days, a very secular promenade for vanity, even a resort of traders' touts—you would see a tailor's man from Cheapside furtively seeking business—and ladies of light ways, and they remained just the same when the Bible was substituted for the Tabernacle. It was symbolical of England; except that round some of the evangelical preachers and in the more sober mansions of country gentlemen the number of puritans slowly grew.

That there was a growth of scepticism no one disputes, but how far it reached is not clear. Sceptics would be pleased to learn that the advance of the nation coincided with a decay of religious belief, but they will candidly admit that it had no social significance. The causes of the Elizabethan Golden Age are clear. It is therefore idle to seek to disprove the growth of scepticism. From 1570 onwards English divines complain bitterly of an increase of "Atheism." As Mr. G. T. Buckley rightly points out in his *Atheism in the English Renaissance* (1932), preachers are in all ages prone to call a rebel of any degree of heterodoxy an "Atheist," and he admits that the revival of such classics as Pliny, Cicero, and Lucretius, the great popularity in England of Erasmus, and the growing acquaintance with Italian literature—let me add that Montaigne's *Essays* were published between 1570 and 1590—caused much scepticism.

The evidence for outright Atheism he, as is the academic custom, does not treat candidly. The Jesuit Parsons accused Raleigh of keeping a "school of Atheisme," with which Chris Marlowe, Ralph Ironside, Sir John Harrington, and others were connected. There is good reason to conclude that Marlowe was an Atheist, and he is hardly likely to have been the only one. But the penalty for Atheism was grim, and the Privy Council moved; and, in short, scepticism took the form of Deism, which now

began to spread. What Elizabeth herself believed is as obscure as the faith of Shakespeare, who has been proved from his works to have been everything from an Atheist to a Catholic. Prof. Pollard says in his *Political History of England* (1910) that "it can hardly be doubted that she was sceptical or indifferent" (VI, 180). It is a question for idle hours. She presided over the transformation of mediæval England into a modern State, the dawn of the better era; and one thing that is clearest about it is that it was *not* "God who made thee mighty."

CHAPTER XIV

THE FRANCE OF LOUIS XIV

THE age of Louis XIV was, says Voltaire, who wrote a history of it, "the most enlightened that ever was," and, since Voltaire was already known as an "enemy of the Faith," some of my readers may feel that at last we approach the epoch when, after more than 1,000 years of social and cultural inferiority, the Christian nations rise above the highest level that man had reached in pre-Christian times or in non-Christian lands.

The alert student of history will, however, entertain some reserve. At the time when Voltaire wrote, two centuries ago, even historians knew little or nothing about the Golden Ages we have passed in review. The documents which told the splendour of the reign of Abd-er-Rahman were securely locked against inquirers in Spanish libraries, China and India were regarded as picturesque experiments on the fringe of real civilization, the resuscitated Greek and Latin literature had yielded a true picture of Greek and Roman life to only a few scholars, and the remains of the earlier great cities were still buried under soil over which purblind men rode on asses and camels. When we further reflect that Voltaire, though an historian of distinction and a sincere humanitarian, was aristocratic in taste and disposed to conciliate the successor of Louis XIV and his court, we need not be impressed by his estimate of France's Golden Age. It is lamentably inaccurate.

There is less excuse for the more complaisant and less expert historical writers of our time who repeat the old flattery of Louis and his age. We found that the Eliza-

bethan advance in England was explained in large part by the European development. The occupation of the remnant of the old Greek Empire by the Turks had closed the East to the ships of the Italian Republics and ruined them, and, as this coincided with the discovery of America, had transferred the high profit of maritime trade to the Atlantic, and therefore to the peoples of western Europe. Rome had, after a century of belated wealth and artistic splendour, been more terribly ravaged by the Catholic (German-Roman) Emperor (1527) than Goths and Vandals had once ravaged it, and the cessation of streams of gold from Germany, Scandinavia, and England had completed the ruin of its prestige as a secular power. In the first half of the seventeenth century Germany and Spain—indeed all countries, west of France, from the Tyrol to the Arctic—were locked in the Thirty Years' (religious) War and would remain prostrate for a century. Spain and Portugal, the heirs of the rich Arab kingdom, had at first monopolized the Atlantic opportunity, and they now suffered almost the most tragic collapse in European history.

From these circumstances France ought to have profited earlier and more richly than England; especially since its population was three times that of England, and the flame of the Italian Renaissance had reached it a century before it reached England. But it was, as I said, paralysed by the religious struggle and the civil wars inspired by the religious struggle. Although Cardinal Richelieu had kept it out of the Thirty Years' War for the extinction of Protestantism and had roused it from its mediæval torpor, although the St. Bartholomew Massacre and the cardinal's measures had driven the great body of the Huguenots to the west coast, the struggle continued in one form or other, and one of the earliest deep experiences of Louis XIV had been a rebellion of Catholic nobles which laid the country desolate for the hundredth time,

emptied the treasury, and gave the court years of anxiety. Out of that experience grew the young King's determination to rule as absolute monarch; and from his policy of keeping the leading nobles in silk and jewels at his court instead of allowing them to strut in armour in defiant provincial castles came more than half the glamour and nearly all the vices of his reign.

With the inauguration of peace, the temporary settlement of the religious quarrel, and the spectacle of its once-powerful enemies, Germany and Spain, in full decay, France was free, like England under Elizabeth, to grasp the golden opportunity of the new age. All the conditions for the creation of a Golden Age were provided by the general European development. The land needed only a constructive genius; and the genius who arose was certainly not Louis XIV. It was his Controller-General of Finance, Jean Colbert.

Let us first dismiss Louis. We are embarrassed to find so shrewd and liberal an historian as Lord Acton calling him "the ablest man who was born in modern times on the steps of a throne," but—notice how the reference to birth excludes Napoleon from comparison—when we reflect on the ability of the other monarchs of modern times we need not demur. Louis was one of the most industrious of kings. Nearly every day he spent hours discussing the affairs of the kingdom with his ministers and councillors. Everything had to be submitted to him, from sanitary regulations in Paris to measures for the improvement of industry or the latest details of his quarrel with the Vatican. He never allowed one of his many mistresses to influence his political judgment. During the long campaign in the Lowlands he spent months every year in the field, often in poor lodgings. He stamped his name upon everything, especially upon the wild extravagances which started the slow ruin of the new France, and, when he no longer had strong ministers to check the

influence of his priests and his narrow-minded third wife, upon the measure which drove the industrious Huguenots from France and brought bankruptcy nearer.

In other words, he was a man of boundless egoism and vanity. We may deny that Elizabeth arrogated the credit for the great things which were done by her subjects, but Louis assuredly did. If he sought *grandeur* for France it was because this made *him* monarch of the richest and greatest kingdom in the world. He never cared two pins, we shall see, how the poorer four-fifths of his people lived. He saw in all the gross scandals of his reign, when they were laid open to the eyes of Europe, only an affront to his majesty. He floated on such clouds of flattery as few modern kings would tolerate. “The King Sun.” There must be unparalleled splendour where he lived and ambassadors came to visit him, if a million workers sweated blood to pay for it.

What was the splendour of his reign? The military glory we dismiss briefly, partly because such a distinction is not in itself a feature of a Golden Age, partly because Louis had little share in earning it. Biographers strain the evidence concerning the Dutch War (1667–78) in the first part of his reign to give him some ability as a commander, but military experts dismiss it. He had able generals both in that and in later wars, and there is no difference of opinion about the fact that it was his second leading minister, Louvois, who created for him the greatest army in contemporary Europe.

Much more important from our point of view was the rapid increase of wealth, and this Louis owed entirely to Colbert. The king's personal contribution was simple: he drove Colbert, as long as that minister lived, to find larger and larger funds for his palaces and his dreams of *grandeur* in the eye of Europe, and he cared not the toss of a coin how his people suffered by the extortion and what was the economic effect of his extravagance.

Jean Colbert had begun his career as a boy in a provincial draper's shop. Moving to Paris, he had caught the eye of Cardinal Mazarin, the successor and "pocket edition" of Richelieu, and he had been promoted to the highest position in the kingdom immediately after Louis's accession. His service to the country was inestimable. He found that the revenue was 84,000,000 *livres* a year, and of this, so corrupt was the administration, 52,000,000 were absorbed in collecting taxes. He raised the revenue to 116,000,000, at a cost of only 23,000,000 a year. Taking on also the Ministry of Marine, he found that the navy consisted of a few old and almost useless vessels. Three years later the king had sixty ships of the line and forty frigates. He created this new wealth of France almost entirely by sagaciously fostering trade and industry. Several new industries were established and protected, new roads and canals and a vigorous suppression of old stupidities promoted internal trade, the colonies in Canada, Martinique, and San Domingo were reorganized, and settlements were made in Cayenne and Madagascar. He reformed the code of law, started the publication of official statistics, and endeavoured to complete the recovery of France by founding several learned academies and encouraging art and letters. He was "the founder of a new epoch in France," says one historian. But under the pressure of the King and the nobles, who hated him because he was a commoner and would check their greed, he had had to lay such burdens upon the people that when he died they threatened to desecrate his body, and it had to be buried, with military protection, by night; while King Louis, taking to himself all the credit, complacently sniffed the clouds of incense.

In most other chapters we have found the monarch, whatever his personal expenditure, raising his capital city, materially and socially, to a higher level. Louis hated Paris, which criticized his ways, and rarely entered

it. His gilded years were spent chiefly at the palace of Saint-Germain, a dozen miles down the river, and later at Versailles. But a "Grand Monarch" must have a Grand Capital, because visitors from abroad talked about it, so he gave La Reynie, his Lieutenant-General of Police, the order to improve the city. It was still packed within the old walls, the common people (or more than three-fourths of the whole) living in crowded high tenements—the entire family sleeping in one bed, as a rule—of a filthy description, and for the most part drinking the water of the Seine; into which, by the way, the open gutters in the centre of the streets ran, and in which the entire population bathed in summer, having no baths even in rich houses. Only a few main streets were paved, and the mud, or dust in dry weather, was ankle-deep and was notorious throughout Europe for its stench; for there were no refuse-pits, and the women threw their garbage, etc., from door or window. There were no street-lamps, and night-crime was appalling. Such was Paris, now the first city in Europe, in the middle of the seventeenth century.

La Reynie, who encountered stubborn opposition from the burghers (since it meant new taxes), introduced garbage-carts, refuse-dumps outside the city, candle-lamps at rare intervals along the centre of the chief streets (but lit only in winter, and to midnight), a larger (but pitifully inadequate) supply of pure water, and a more efficient police and spy (detective) force. A few broader streets were pierced, gardens laid out, fountains of bronze and marble erected. The wealth which flowed from the palace to the nobles bore some fruit in new and very handsome hotels near the river. New churches appeared. But there were no new and costly public buildings, no elegant theatres and places of entertainment. The most frequent public spectacle was the beheading or burning of a criminal before the Hôtel de Ville (Town Hall), to which men of all classes took their wives and children.

Normally, we found, a large accession of wealth in a nation after a period of poverty and decay flowered into a higher art and literature; just as the bulbs of tulip and hyacinth break through the soil when the winter has passed. One usually gets the impression from writers on the Grand Age (*Grand Siècle*), as they still call it in the obsequious language of the older French writers, that this happened in France under Louis XIV: that, in fact, a new literary and artistic brilliance gives the period its chief title to be called a Golden Age. This belief is based upon a slovenly and inaccurate version of French history.

The French Renaissance had begun under Richelieu, who was greater even than Colbert. It was he who founded the French Academy and invited artists, writers, and scholars to contribute to the greatness of France. The Golden Age of French literature was almost over when Louis XIV took command and said "I am the State." Rabelais and Montaigne belong to the previous century. Descartes, Pascal, Cyrano de Bergerac, and Molière were dead. Racine lingered, but he was under a cloud because he had pressed upon the royal notice the appalling sufferings of the peasants. Corneille was near his literary extinction. Only La Fontaine, Boileau, and Mme de Sévigné, of the greater writers, were still active; with Bossuet and Fénelon in the religious field. There had been a very keen interest in science in the preceding generation, but it almost died under Louis XIV.

It was much the same with painting, the only other art besides letters to rise to distinction in the French Renaissance. Poussin and Claude preceded the age of Louis; Watteau comes in the last part of the reign; Fragonard belongs to the next century; Le Brun died twenty-five years before Louis. Those who still painted under Louis and the artists of less distinction were of course patronized. There were the new palace at Versailles and the palaces and hotels of princes and rich nobles to be adorned.

Some experts complain that Louis cramped them by his insufferable vanity. "They might still," a recent writer says, "go to the classical past for their models of expression, but not for their subject, for Louis was Jupiter, Apollo, Phoebus, Alexander, Augustus, and even the Sun."

Dignified and impressive as Louis contrived to make himself in person and carriage, a modern writer ought to be restrained by a sense of humour from calling him the *Roi Soleil* (King Sun) and his age the *Grand Siècle*. He mouthed fine sentiments about a prince's supreme duty of self-control, and few great monarchs had less. The diary of his chief physician shows that he was a glutton at table, and he was so dosed and drugged—to which his butler, bribed by his mistresses, added aphrodisiacs—that his breath was foul. He never at any time between the age of sixteen and forty-five curbed his appetite for illicit love, though he was unquestionably an unwavering believer in the doctrines of his Church. His *Golden Age* is one of the least attractive in our series. It means little more than that his leading minister trebled the wealth of France and, as this coincided with the policy of keeping the nobility at or round the court, it broke out in magnificent mansions, costumes, displays of jewellery, equipages, gardens, balls, etc.

The gold of *this* *Golden Age* was in the silks, velvets, brocades, gold cloth, fine lace, precious stones, costly plumes, and deep purses (especially for gambling) of a small minority of the nation. The king's brother, a fatuous insipid prince, would have large emeralds or diamonds for the buttons of his coat. Literally millions of pounds rang, often until seven or eight in the morning, on the gambling tables in the few nights of a festive season. The king's chief mistress, the Marquise de Montespan, lost 700,000 crowns in one night. The nobles cheated each other so much that Louis had to forbid several card games. Even their refinement was not more than skin

deep. Some of the highest ladies of the court swore and wrangled like fishwives, and their customs were in some ways (sanitation, etc.) mediævally gross. Mme de Montespan, greater lady than the queen for ten years, never took a bath. Others . . . But on this subject we leave the curtain undrawn.

In earlier chapters we have seen a monarch make his son a New Year present of 1,000,000 gold coins, a vizier make his Caliph presents worth £1,000,000, but the whole nation prospered. Under Louis XIV the overwhelming majority of the people suffered worse than did the workers under Elizabeth in England. They had borne a terrible burden during the civil wars before and in the early part of Louis's reign. There are official contemporary documents in the Appendix to the thirteenth volume of Martin's *Histoire de France* which no one cares to translate and no other historian ever mentions. From 1650 to 1660, they show, the people in wide regions of most of the provinces of France were hunted from their homes by the tax-gatherers and lived on roots, berries, even grass, in the forests and caves. Some tried to bite their own lean bodies, so frantic were they with hunger. In one village 200 of the 450 inhabitants lay dead on the street. In one small town were 600 orphans without a stitch of clothing. Yet when prosperity came these folk had no share of it. Colbert was forced to continue during the peace to levy vast taxes. The agricultural populations had, says a social historian, a very meagre living at the best of times, but they suffered terribly in bad years. More than 100,000 of them were still serfs (slaves) under the King Sun.

More picturesque vices of the time than this disdain and exploitation of the mass of the people, whose retaliation when their hour came so deeply moves us, are well known. It is hardly necessary to discuss sexual behaviour, but some relief is now offered to us in the assurance that

the clergy unceasingly “warred upon the king’s heart.” The words are taken from Crétineau-Joly, whom the French Jesuits assisted to write an apologetic history of their Society (1845), and his unscrupulous work is still recommended everywhere as the standard authority. He quotes the sceptical Bayle as saying that Father Annat, Louis’s first Jesuit confessor, “teased him daily about his sin and gave him no rest.” Bayle expressly says that this is false. Louis had three Jesuit confessors in succession during the twenty years of his worst irregularities, and they never left him. Twice the Church refused him the sacrament at Easter if he would not leave his mistress, but the clergy said nothing when he returned to her in a few weeks. Even this does not tell the whole shame. Louis, as the biographers omit to tell, took the sacraments of his Church not only at Easter but on four other of the chief religious festivals, and there was not a curé in France who did not know how he lived. Mme de Montespan, who had seven children by him, all of whom were raised to the highest rank—Louis forced her sister as abbess upon the greatest convent in France—lived in a finer suite than the queen in the palace and had her initials interlaced with his, in gold letters, on every panel of her magnificent barge on the Seine, which everybody in Paris admired. Louis built for her a palace at Clagny at a cost of £500,000 sterling. His enormous extension and decoration of the palace at Versailles cost about £10,000,000.

That the king’s licence was imitated by the great majority of the nobles and ladies of the court no one questions, and it is only a very bold and foolish apologist who ventures to defend the leading Churchmen. The people of Paris sang a song about their Archbishop in the streets and wine-shops: the poor man, it said, had been compelled to economize by reducing the number of his aristocratic mistresses from four to three. From these highest levels of Church and State the contagion spread,

through all classes of clergy and laity. The practice of quoting a few good priests or bishops or a few virtuous ladies of the court is idle, since no writer ever contended that all were corrupt. The general licence was astounding. Several volumes of the *Archives of the Bastille* have been published, and three or four large quarto volumes of this work are filled with trials for murder during the reign of Louis XIV. Incidentally these proceedings reveal a freedom of morals in all classes at Paris greater than we find in the case of ancient Rome.

But a comparison with any ancient city would be unfair to the latter, since virtually all the French professed the Christian code of conduct, the clergy living on a profession even of its more ascetic counsels. There was less open scepticism in the reign of Louis XIV than there had been in the reign of his predecessor. But the comparison with ancient cities breaks down entirely when we consider worse matters than sexual irregularity.

Quite a number of volumes have been written in French on the appalling frequency of murder by poisoning in the middle of Louis's reign. The art had lingered in Rome from the days of the Borgia, and Italian poisoners brought it to Paris. Death from colic (arsenic) became alarmingly common, and an arrest led to the discovery of a Society of Chemists who under that respectable cloak made a rich living by coining and brewing poison. When the life of the king was threatened pressure was put upon the police, and they discovered so frightful a body of poisoners and so much recourse to them on the part of the upper middle class (wives of judges and high officials) and the nobility that there was a prolonged panic, and all Europe was astounded. A score of nobles and noble ladies, including several who stood next only to the king's mistress at court, were impeached or involved. Some confessed and were tortured and executed in the chief square of the city before the greatest crowds Paris had

ever seen; while the core of the movement was a body of women of the vilest type—a Franciscan friar and a Jesuit also were among the manufacturers of poison—some of whom made fortunes by selling poison and abortives and were honourably received, ostensibly to tell fortunes, in the salons of the most distinguished ladies. The vilest of them all, Catherine Montvoisin, a drunken and profligate woman who arranged Black Masses and sacrificed children to the devil in addition to other crimes, dressed in a mantle which was covered with small eagles of pure gold and was authentically valued at £3,000. The price of a single murder or deal with the devil sometimes rose to £1,000.

It is now the fashion to smile at this cult of the devil under Louis XIV, or, at the most, to grant that a few apostate and abandoned priests may have duped silly women by a pretence of Black Masses. Even some historians observe that no credence can be given to stories which were extracted by small-minded and credulous magistrates from tortured witnesses. It is time that some responsible historian warned the public against these apologetic falsifications of history. Of the score of priests of Paris who were convicted of Satanist practices not one was an apostate. Some of them served in the most fashionable churches, but all were in active service; and a dozen special chapels in secret places (publicans' cellars, old barns, etc.), black-draped and with black or yellow candles, were unearthed. As to the evidence, hardly one item of it was obtained by torture, for it was not the custom to apply torture until after sentence had been pronounced. The "gullible" magistrates and police of the apologist are just as imaginary. The king was compelled to appoint a special tribunal which consisted of some of the ablest judges and royal councillors; and, amazing as are the published disclosures, Louis withdrew many reports of the examination of witnesses and burned

them before he died. Mme de Montespan, whom he had made the first lady of France, was more deeply implicated than any other lady of the court. Time after time she lay naked on the altar-table while the Satanist priests mumbled their blasphemies over her.

I have referred incidentally to torture, and we have here a further feature of life in the Grand Siècle which must be noticed. Less than 200 years ago barbaric tortures were still used in France. One was to pour a large quantity of water through a funnel down the throat of a man or woman who was bound naked on a trestle. The Marquise de Brinvilliers, a small, aristocratic lady who confessed that she had poisoned her father and her brothers, had eight quarts of water forced into her before she was executed in 1676. Another torture was "the Spanish boots"; frames of leather and iron which were strapped on the lower part of the legs, and wedges were then driven in until the bones cracked. The prisoner often died. Men had their tongues pierced with hot iron for blasphemy, their hands cut off for other crimes. Breaking on the wheel was still another form of execution. Let me repeat, however, that no detail of the charges of poisoning and devil-worship had to be extracted by torture.

We must, in fine, contrast the age of Louis XIV with that of Elizabeth, and particularly with those I have previously described, in regard to toleration; for Elizabeth had no wish to persecute Catholics until they resorted to conspiracy to murder. France had in the sixteenth century seemed just as likely as various provinces of Germany to abandon the Church of Rome. The spread of Protestantism had been checked by violence, but there remained so large and important a body of Huguenots, as they came to be called, that Henry IV, a Protestant who became a diplomatic Catholic, enacted a policy of toleration in his Edict of Nantes. Under Louis XIV this was never strictly observed. Numbers of Protestant children

were taken from their parents and educated as Catholics. But the large population of Huguenots in the west so materially contributed to the revenue by their sober and prosperous industry that statesmen foiled the attempts of Churchmen to get Protestantism suppressed. When Colbert was dead and Louis had brought his amorous adventures to a close, the Edict of Nantes was revoked and Protestantism was declared illegal (1685). Half the work of Colbert was ruined, for about 400,000 of the best artisans of France left the country. It slowly moved towards the condition of disguised bankruptcy and distress which was the immediate cause of the Revolution.

It will not be unintelligible if the reader complains that I have here paid far more attention to the vices and far less to the excellences of the Golden Age than I have done in previous chapters, but the charge would be unjust. In not a single case of the high civilizations which I described in the first twelve chapters could I have assigned vices or crimes on a national scale such as we find in the reign of Louis XIV. In no other case was there so cruel and insolent a disregard of the welfare of the mass of the nation; and the reader will not fail to notice that in respect of this vice, which is one of the worst from our modern ethical point of view, the age of Elizabeth comes nearest to that of Louis. In no case was the monarch so hypocritical in his personal conduct, so intensely selfish in his general policy. The gold of his Golden Age consists almost entirely in the extravagant splendour with which he surrounded himself: the sumptuousness of Versailles, the lavishness of his gifts to his family and favourites, the external brilliance of the nobles and ladies of his court. He did nothing to create the wealth which these transmuted into colour and glamour; and few monarchs kept themselves so arrogantly aloof from the men who produced it, so callous about the condition of his people. He sought "the glory of France" and the adornment of Paris solely, or chiefly, because that

enhanced his own glory. We have a hundred works on him and every aspect of his age, and they tell no different story, while the writers often repeat the slavish chorus of "Great Age" and "Great Monarch." They count that age golden in which the wealth is expended on palaces and courtiers, silks and pearls, royal balls and fêtes à la Watteau, instead of upon noble public buildings, works of general welfare and mercy, and the education and elevation of the humble millions.

CHAPTER XV

THE AGE OF SCIENCE

WE have now exhausted the list of the peaks in the history of civilization which historians agree to call man's Golden Ages. The reader may feel, as the author feels, that some of them are hardly worthy of inclusion in the list, but it was clearly advisable to consider all the periods to which most of the authorities on that period award their gold medal. We are therefore now in a position to distil from the facts a philosophy of history of far higher value than the rhetorical speculations or, as in the case of Spengler, the turgid accumulations of facts with which various writers have suborned history to support their theories. We have closely examined the ages in which some portion of the race did make a notable advance, and in each case we have found it possible to assign the causes of the advance. An analogous study of the Iron Ages of history would seem to be required before we can reach a definite conclusion, but it is obvious that a relaxation of the creative causes is a sufficient explanation of decay, and in most cases I have shortly indicated that this occurred.

One's first impression of this occasional elevation of some section of the human family to a higher level is that it is generally, if not always, due to a strong monarch. Political writers who claim that this fact ought to be decisive in our modern controversy about dictatorship or democracy are, however, illogical. A properly enlightened democracy would choose or employ its strongest man, as Athens chose Pericles, or half a dozen of its strongest men.

There is, moreover, a fallacy in the phrase "strong man." Modern experience shows that in political practice

it generally means an ambitious man with a peculiar and unscrupulous command of violent and reckless language. The only modern dictator who has not patently failed, if we compare the economic, cultural, and social condition of his State with those of the democracies, is the man who, while in public he maintained the fiction of his semi-divinity, in fact had the shrewdness to recognize his limitations and select the most capable lieutenants, just as a sensible democracy would; and even in this case the apparent success proves, when we make a statistical examination of it, to be a failure. Our general literature suffers gravely from its ignorance of science. It gives most people the impression that "will" is a sort of ethereal fluid, something like the "magnetism" of the last century, of which one man may have, or acquire (by a correspondence course, perhaps), much more than others. Modern psychology has abandoned the word "will" and brought the acts we ascribed to it into line with intellect or intelligence.

The strong men of the Golden Ages were men of penetrating intelligence, breadth of view, and great power of concentration on their tasks; if we omit such instances as those we described in the three preceding chapters, when circumstances conspired to create a national prosperity and able ministers were available to take full advantage of them. They were men who, when it was required, were robust and unselfish enough to conduct arduous military campaigns and strong enough, when the national security was accomplished, to desist from aggression and maintain their armed forces to protect the peace of their people. There is no instance in our series in which the successful ruler betrays the ugly aggressive temper and braggadocio of our modern dictators, or needed to retain the admiration of his people by such methods. They were in most cases men of sensual temperament and considerable indulgence, yet clear-sighted enough to perceive that, if half their lives

belonged to themselves, the other half belonged to their people.

We may now ignore Lorenzo de' Medici and Louis XIV and say that the makers of Golden Ages were rulers who made it their first aim to secure peace, prosperity, and comfort for the entire nation. We have seen unmistakably that the basic condition of every Golden Age was wealth. From that alone large artistic and cultural developments arise, and without that even the benevolent ruler cannot embark upon any extensive plan of social service. After our survey of the Golden Ages this may seem a platitude, but in fact it contradicts one of the first principles of all moralizing literature about the conditions of the maintenance or advance of civilization: the supposed need for a "grasp of spiritual realities."

In so far as this deliberately vague phrase means the cultivation of the mind and its resources, we reply that it clearly results from our study that it does not matter a row of pins whether or not the mind is regarded as a spiritual reality. In most of the Golden Ages of the higher type which we have studied, materialism, whether of the Greek, Chinese, Roman, or Arab-Persian type, was the prevailing creed among the educated and creative class. Taking the familiar phrase about spiritual realities in its proper sense, the claim that belief in these is required for creating or maintaining a high standard of civilization is not merely arbitrary but is false to the entire history of man's more successful efforts in the past. When a writer does venture to suggest an historical vindication of it, we find him offering us an ignorant mush of ancient statements that Babylonian, Greek, Roman, or other vices led to the decay of civilization. We have seen that this is false.

The same evidence completely discredits the claim that religion, in any form, is one of the factors, much less the chief factor, of a high civilization. As far as wealth and

the art and culture that arise from it are concerned this is obvious. But we need little reflection on the preceding chapters to see that it is just as true of the social idealism which I have counted one of the noblest marks of a Golden Age. In eight of the most idealistic of them—in Greece (three), Rome, China (two), Persia, and Arab-Spain—the prevailing creed in the guiding class was a radical scepticism, if not a dogmatic materialism (as Stoicism, Epicureanism, and Confucianism are). In the other pre-Christian cases there is much evidence of liberalism or scepticism in regard to religion, none of an effective religious impulse. We do not for a moment suppose that these ancient rulers grasped the economic truth that one of the surest conditions of prosperity is to raise the purchasing power of the poorer consumers. We are content with the plain fact that the three materialistic systems I have named effectively inspired human service.

If in the spirit of the scientific man we care to check our social analysis, we must surely say that the three Golden Ages in our series which are least distinguished for an unselfish use of the new wealth in attempts to improve the condition of the people are the Florentine, English, and French; and in these religion was strongest. We may, or must, go further, and say that Florence in its Golden Age was at least superior to the England of Elizabeth and the France of Louis XIV in its encouragement of culture and scholarship, and the Florentine atmosphere was the least religious of the three.

We find again, therefore, that a statement which is entirely opposed to the historical facts pervades our literature. The Christian religion, whatever its merits, has not been an inspiration of civilization. I invite the critical reader to verify my selection of Golden Ages. He will find a substantial agreement about them among historians. Yet in 1,000 years before the triumph of Christianity (about A.D. 400) we find seven, and they are of

high quality; we have three outside the Christian world during the next few centuries; and among the Christian nations we count only three in fourteen centuries—none for the first 1,000 years—and these are deeply tainted with crime, vice, and neglect of the welfare of the people.

A final lesson, and one that is equally irresistible and equally opposed to the conventions of our literature, is that sexual laxity is neither a hindrance to the advance of a civilization nor, of itself, a cause of social and political decay. No socio-historical statement is more common in our non-expert literature than that “vice” or “profligacy” or “brutal lusts” caused the downfall of civilizations. We saw that this is entirely false. Almost every Golden Age was a period of great freedom of conduct. Almost every maker of a Golden Age was, at least if custom did not grant him a large harem—and often if it did—a man who ignored the code of sexual behaviour which Europe came to accept; and if we had included a few additional reigns which one or other writer would have suggested—for instance, the reign of Augustus, Charlemagne, Frederic II, Frederick the Great, or Napoleon—we should find the same condition.

Since in these pre-democratic days so much depended upon the monarch, we must particularly note this fact. It will be found that any writer who now repeats the old view is thinking of ancient Rome and is ludicrously unaware that the vicious periods he has in mind (if any) preceded the actual fall of Rome by three or four centuries; and that the Empire had Christian rulers for more than a century before it fell. He is too prejudiced to see that a Ptolemy, a Hadrian, or an Abd-er-Rahman who is very sensual yet does not let indulgence impair his fitness for his royal task must not be confused with a Nero or an Elagabal.

These are the true lessons of history, but we must use careful discrimination when we would apply them to our own time with its profoundly different conditions. I

pointed out one essential difference. Since it is now our ideal, however imperfectly we realize it at present, that the adult members of a nation shall elect a few hundred men who shall have sufficient ability and integrity to choose the dozen or score ablest men to supervise Departments of State which have very large and permanent staffs of experts, it is obviously no longer necessary to have a high capacity in the constitutional "ruler." However, the relevance or irrelevance of our lessons of the past will appear as we proceed.

I take what we call modern civilization—the social, political, and economic system which is found at its best in the United States, France, Great Britain, and the smaller west-European countries—as our last Golden Age, and I regard it as worthy of that title from about 1860 or 1870 onward. With those who pronounce it an age of decadence in comparison with an earlier age, particularly the Middle Ages, we will not argue. They take their knowledge of the past from works—sectarian manuals, romantic biographies, etc.—which are largely fiction, and they absorb avidly such shibboleths of our general literature as that religion or asceticism or a grasp of spiritual realities promotes civilization; that we have lost the ideals of a supposed Age of Chivalry; that men were stronger or longer-lived or clearer-headed in the Middle Ages than they now are; or that our age is more materialistic (in the moral sense) and sensual than its predecessors were. We have seen how false all this is as regards the past, and we shall now see through what distorting glasses these folk look upon the world in which they live.

First let me make one or two general observations. The literary men who, since our scientists, historians, and economists generally write so unattractively or technically, have attained so much prestige as guides to thinking in our modern Press and literature have an artistic repugnance to the laborious study of facts, but they protest that at

least here such study is unnecessary. The truth, they say, hurts their eyes. You would call this drab, dingy, grimy age a Golden Age, these essayists and popular oracles of the Chesterton School exclaim, with an air of supreme common sense ! Where is its golden colour, its art, its jollity ?

They are, of course, contrasting our age with the Middle Ages, which they profess to know so well ; and they are profoundly ignorant of the most vital truths about life in the Middle Ages. They have wildly inaccurate ideas about the general character, and to read such a book as Thorold Rogers's *Six Centuries of Work and Wages* (1884), which would tell them how the vast majority of the people really lived—how nine-tenths lived in fouler conditions than one-tenth of the people of our cities have to-day—would give them a headache. They just see the artistic highlights of mediæval life—the noble cathedrals and stately civic halls, the statues which princes and churches had carved for them, the paintings of nobles and burghers in silk, velvet, and jewels, the Cellini daggers and gold cups, etc.—which four-fifths of the people, plodding like their oxen from sun-up to sun-down on more than 300 days of the year, never even saw. The age which takes such superficial and half-educated folk as its guides, because they write prettily, must not complain when it wanders into a morass.

Even many, however, who do not share the creed of these writers will feel, from the same æsthetic cause, a sort of instinctive reluctance to call our own time a Golden Age. The feeling reminds us how predominantly we have fastened upon the glitter of wealth, or the monopoly of it by a small minority of the population, in speaking of periods of the past as Golden Ages. In most cases, we saw, this picturesque and vividly coloured life of the rich, perhaps with a notable development of art and literature, was the chief feature to attract attention.

There is here a psychological element upon which I have

not space to enlarge. As humanity matures, especially in its masculine half, it prefers sobriety of colour. The movement energetically supported by the late Prof. Armstrong for introducing brighter colours into the masculine costume appealed even to few artists and was ridiculed by the admirers of the colourful Middle Ages. One notices, too, that in backward countries like those of south-eastern Europe vividness of colouring in dress is retained in almost exact proportion to the ignorance of the section of the population which clings to it. During a journey through those countries about fifteen years ago I saw all the rich colour of the Middle Ages in crowds of peasants and farmers on festivals, but in Belgrade, Sofia, Athens, and even Candia I noticed a drabness of costume that made the city-folk folk resemble Londoners. The men affected grey or brown, and the women were soberly dressed. Even in London a woman with a pink or sky-blue or light-green silk blouse is usually identified as a provincial of little education on a holiday. But one has only to compare the contents of the houses of these folk with the houses of grey-clad, better-educated people to recognize that it is actually an improved taste in the latter that is killing the earlier flamboyancy of colour.

That we produce no great art in comparison with Periclean Athens, mediæval China, or Renaissance Italy is again a matter of psychology which I have not space to discuss. These richer efflorescences of art (except music, which is in its higher development a modern art because of its intellectual element) are usually a spring-time growth, an outcome of the surging impulses of a time of national revival after a long reaction or a grave reverse. The higher development of intellect comes later. We have in our time the compensation of a much wider spread of good taste and refined sentiment. A thousand people enjoy high art to-day for a hundred who did in most cities and most periods, even during the Renaissance. Any man

who knows what England was 100 years ago, as I have described it in detail in my *Century of Stupendous Progress* (1926)—and it was then already less coarse than the England of Anne or Elizabeth or any earlier reign—knows that we have had considerable success, and could have had far greater success, in democratizing refinement and knowledge as well as political control. Let the reader turn back to the chapter on France in the days of Louis XIV. All Paris then lived, and had for several centuries lived, within less than a mile of the great cathedral, yet the immense majority lived in such coarseness and filth as we can hardly imagine, and there was a surprising amount of vulgarity, even of uncleanliness, among the nobles. In the five-fold larger city of to-day the great majority are clean, sober, humane, and proud of their fine avenues, parks, and artistic monuments.

And this gives us part of the answer to another jibe at modern civilization. It is mechanical, machine-made, an iron age. The reproach came originally, and with complete sincerity, from artistic groups connected with such writers as William Morris and Ruskin, but the practical feeling at the back of it was futile. The vast demand of our thickly populated world *has* to be met by machine or mass-production, and, if the products of the machine are often crude, garish, and in bad taste, the fault lies mainly in our system of education or pretence of education. The character of the supply is determined by the demand. That is the reply of newspapers and story-writers who cater to bad taste and low sentiment, just as it is of manufacturers of red-plush furniture, crude oleographs, blaring gramophones, and ugly clothes. The machine can supply tasteful pictures, artistic furniture, and graceful, sober-coloured vases whenever we educate the mass of the people to demand them.

Most people recognize this, and the jibe at the machine-made age has become as vaguely foolish as the cry that

our age is mechanical or materialistic. Our analysis of modern progress in the next chapter will show the absurdity or hollowness of these reproaches. The science which chiefly gives its character to the modern age has had bitter opponents since long before the days of Galileo. In so far as this opposition was sustained in the name of Humanism it has been disarmed, except in the minds of certain literary men and artists, by the very obvious service to humanity of the application of science. But new groups of opponents arose and took over the old shibboleths. The religious writers who claim that the conflict of science and religion is over represent only the better-educated minority of their organizations, and even they watch with concern the development of such sciences as psychology, biochemistry, and prehistoric archaeology. The entirely fallacious statement which circulated in popular literature after the acceptance of Relativity, that *all* scientific theses were now admitted to have only a relative value—which was interpreted to mean that they were merely the best guesses we could make at the moment—evoked a surprising amount of satisfaction. And to these groups were added in the course of the last half-century the large bodies of men and women who are drawn into opposition by their anti-vaccination, anti-vivisection, and other movements. Our generation is accustomed to the amusing thrusts at science of Mr. G. B. Shaw, but it was surprised and puzzled by the disdainful attacks of Mr. Bertrand Russell (in *Icarus*; 1924).

How this vaguely diffused sentiment of opposition prevents large numbers from appreciating the superiority of their own age is revealed by the ease with which totally false statements are accepted to the detriment of science. The one evil which has increased during the century or so in which science has been applied to life is war, and many attempts are made to blame science for this. It has, we are told, invented mechanisms so costly and destructive

that nations exhaust themselves to keep the pace in a race of armaments, and this race "always leads to war." The fallacy of blaming science for the employment of its inventions by governments and their engineers for uses which scientific man never contemplated is obvious enough. One might as well say that it is a pity that the chemistry which has given us medicinal drugs, anæsthetics, antiseptics, perfumes, artificial silk, etc., was ever developed because this has enabled some to manufacture cocaine and heroin, poisonous gas, and high explosives. But when this prejudice goes on to assert that the armament-race which science is supposed to have inspired always leads to war, the statement is almost the reverse of the truth. Practically all the major wars from 1870 onward broke out because one party had not kept pace with the aggressor in armament; whereas a fair equality in the armament-race has, as in 1911, repeatedly checked would-be aggressors and prevented war.

Hardly less false is the very common statement that science has made war more deadly and destructive than ever. Those who make the claim never trouble to inquire just how deadly warfare was before this century, and to compare the figures of mortality with the statistics of casualties in recent wars. Mulhall's valuable old *Dictionary of Statistics* will give any person the earlier figures, and the statistics of later wars are easily available. They show that in point of fact war has become steadily less deadly since the Crimean and the American Civil War. If these critics were not so disdainful of the scientific spirit it would occur to them at once that the large horrors which fill their minds, and ours, mean primarily that our wars are clashes of far larger bodies of men than ever occurred before. Statisticians have shown repeatedly, not in apology for science, but as a matter of fact, that the proportion of deaths to the total number of either combatants or non-combatants is now less than it ever

was; and, in saving the wounded and conquering the appalling diseases which formerly infected camp and trench, science is much more directly concerned than in the manufacture of aeroplanes, guns, and explosives. For the direct attacks upon civilians which some have introduced into modern warfare science has, of course, not the least responsibility.

There is much the same looseness of sentiment and language in the cry, which the novelty-seeking Press has made painfully familiar, that civilization is in danger of perishing from our scientific warfare. It is inconceivable that a modern war should do even as much damage in Europe as the Thirty Years' War of the seventeenth century, when men still fought with very slow-firing muskets and you could almost see a cannon-ball coming. Science has, and with far greater willingness, added just as much efficacy to the forces of reconstruction as to those of destruction. We have seen, in fact, that military science itself discovers checks upon each advance of destructive power. Apart from this, Europe is no longer the world, and, even if it were devastated, it would not need a few refugee missionaries of civilization to come, as in Mr. Wells's film *The Shape of Things to Come*, from the Persian hills to begin the work of restoration.

It is in a vague docility to all these fallacies and superficial mis-statements that so many pay serious attention to the cry that science is a mechanical monster which turns upon the man who created it; that science, or the intellectual part of man, has outstripped his moral qualities in development and we ought to give it a long "holiday." It is a pity that writers in periodical literature are so ready to put before the public any theories which are startling or paradoxical. The plain solution of the paradox is that the modern age called upon science to render certain services—from the study of the universe, the atom, or the living structure to the production of new

metals, drugs, or plastic materials, and the harnessing of new energies. It has rendered these services with magnificent success. But we fenced off other departments of national and international life against the intrusion of the scientific man, and it is just here that we have the roots of all our disorders.

A few years ago a distinguished economist drew general attention by declaring to an academic audience that the time had come for science to turn aside from its electrons and protons, its galaxies and its amino-acids, and concentrate upon the diseases of collective life: wars, poverty, depressions, the mental vitality and character of the average man, and so on. To my knowledge this scientific gentleman was privately asked some months later what prevented him and his colleagues from giving their attention to these large and palpitating human interests, and he replied that he and a number of other scientific men had met for the purpose, but the cabinet minister to whom they submitted a draft of their provisional findings told them to put it in the waste-paper basket because it had no chance of being even considered!

Our misfortune is not that the intellect of man has outstripped his other "faculties"—whatever that may mean—but that this higher development of intellect has been confined to *a minority of the race*, and that we then direct these men of specially trained mind and exact habits of thought to restrict themselves to providing us with cheaper stockings, aspirin, motor-cars, or aluminium saucepans, and leave what we call the graver problems of life to political adventurers, preachers, educational mandarins, or literary men like Beverley Nichols or Sir Philip Gibbs. During the old days of the suffrage agitation a shrewd American lady asked us: How did you expect to make progress when you left half the race tied to the starting post? It is worse than that. It would be reasonable to express surprise that we made so much

progress, overwhelmingly through the operation of science, in spite of our weakness. For that we have in the last 100 years made advances which lift our world high above the world of any earlier age a brief summary of our distinctively modern achievements will now put beyond question.

CHAPTER XVI

THE MODERN ACHIEVEMENT

SOME years ago I attempted to give an exact measurement of our modern progress (*1825-1925: A Century of Stupendous Progress*; 1926). I noticed that men and women were on all sides listening to the assurances of anti-scientific writers that our age was inferior to some earlier age (unspecified, of course), of moralists that we had lost our hold on spiritual realities, of political partisans that the poor were poorer and the rich richer, and so on, and I, having a vivid recollection of life in Manchester half a century earlier, was amazed at the facile acceptance of their pessimism. I took from the papers of the year 1825 an exact description of life at that time and compared whatever precise figures and statistics were available with those of the year 1925. I concluded that in the course of 100 years the race, in Great Britain and the leading civilizations, had made more progress than in any previous 500 years of history. The only correction of this statement that I heard from a competent authority was when I discussed the book with Luther Burbank in his study at Santa Rosa, and he urged me to say in the next edition that the race made more progress in that 100 years than in the whole of its previous history !

If readers were attentive to the elementary fact that to speak of deterioration in our age implies a comparison with some other age, they would quickly discover that the writer who disparages our age has anything but an exact knowledge, which is essential, of life in earlier ages. They now have, in the preceding chapters, a fair knowledge of the best aspects of life in the best periods of history,

and it will be easy to show that up to 1925, or even some years later, our world had made the phenomenal progress which I claim.

Since the increase of wealth is the first or basic condition of an advance, as we have seen throughout, we begin with that. A critic has objected that ours ought to be called the Age of Gold rather than a Golden Age, but the only point of the criticism is that our gold does not, as it did in the earlier periods of splendour, break into a rich efflorescence of art, upon which I have commented; or that the gold is so unevenly distributed that it gives an unprecedented power to a minority. How the new wealth has been distributed we shall consider, but we have already seen that the earlier Golden Ages were Ages of Gold—of vast wealth comparatively to other periods, and in the possession of a minority—and that this was the primary condition of their superior culture and whatever social work they performed. Just as obviously the far vaster social service of our time depends as much upon material resources as it does upon humane feeling for its impulse and science for its direction.

We must, in fact, in charity to earlier Golden Ages, realize that one of the reasons why we so far surpass them in social service is that we have created a vast new wealth. Here there is no room for peevish dispute, but the reader may care to have definite measurements. Roundly, the wealth of the leading nations has increased nearly ten-fold during the last 100 years, while the population has normally, apart from immigration, little more than doubled. It would be misleading to take the economic condition since the great depression set in (1929 and 1930), but fortunately I had gathered the material before that date. In the case of the United States, where the population has increased mainly by immigration, it is necessary to consider the growth of wealth per head. According to the National Bureau of Economic Research it increased

from \$320 per head in 1850 to \$3,000 in 1921; and I may add that by 1929 it was considerably over \$3,000. The national income increased in the same period from \$90 per head to more than \$600.

In Great Britain the national wealth increased from £2,600,000,000 in 1822 (with a population of 22,000,000) to £25,000,000,000 (some say £20,000,000,000) in 1925. The national income rose in the same period from £300,000,000 a year to £3,900,000,000. The population has a little more than doubled, but the hours of labour and the years of employment have been so much reduced that by 1930 Great Britain was producing more than ten times as much wealth as in 1830 with the same amount of labour (or working hours). In France national wealth rose from about £3,000,000,000 in 1830 to £12,000,000,000 in 1923. In Germany the national wealth was more than doubled in twenty years (1888–1908).

Economic figures are so misleading to the inexpert that I must add a word of explanation. Of the national wealth (from navy to private houses and furniture) of Great Britain, at least one-fifth is now *public* wealth, and it consists of property (parks, schools, baths, libraries, etc.), a very large part of which is for the almost exclusive use of the workers and lower middle class; to say nothing of their Trade Union and Co-operative funds, Post Office deposits, etc. Of the national income about £500,000,000 is devoted annually to public services (pensions, education, etc.) which again chiefly benefit the worker. Yet, in addition, the real wage of the worker was trebled between 1825 and the end of the century, and the average hours of labour were reduced from about ninety to about forty-five per week; and science has brought within his reach luxuries (on the old standard) of which his grandfathers had hardly dreamed and has provided him with forms of entertainment (cinema, wireless, travel, etc.) far surpassing those of any earlier civilization. We have therefore to

read with reserve such statements as that science has made the rich richer and the poor poorer. What is true in the complaint is that unemployment increases; for which not science but economic conservatism is responsible.

The question whether a radical improvement by economic reconstruction is possible cannot be considered here. It is enough for my purpose that the large majority of the people of a modern nation have so far derived benefit from the increase of wealth that they are, not merely in nominal wage but in goods and services, three times as rich as—or, if you prefer, less poor than—workers ever were before.

Let us add the inestimable benefit of the advance of medical and sanitary science. However we may criticize the medical profession, it is a fact that the average expectation of life has been nearly trebled since the Middle Ages and doubled since the beginning of the last century. The phrase “cold statistics” is here particularly applicable. The population of England and Wales took four and a half centuries (A.D. 1200 to 1650) to creep from a little over 2,000,000 to 4,500,000, and a further century and a quarter to double again. It would now, but for the artificial restriction of births, double in a third of a century. If we translate these cold figures into the warm realities of life, and if we remember that non-fatal disease was just as much more prevalent then than now as were the fatal diseases which account for the appalling death-rate, we have some idea of the terrible burden of suffering which has been lifted from the backs of the people.

But a more concrete illustration is necessary to enable us to measure the progress made during 100 years in that improvement of the condition of the great majority which is the soundest test of a Golden Age. Take the life of the average worker or of the great body of the workers. It may have puzzled some when, in showing the effect of

the application of science to production, I said that we now produce ten times as much wealth as in 1830 with the same volume of labour. But it is easily shown. A century ago children—there was no compulsory education and hardly one in ten was ever taught in a school—normally entered the factories and workshops at the age of seven, and they usually worked fourteen hours a day—often sixteen—for six days a week. The teeming workhouses, in fact, provided the employers with hundreds of thousands of even younger children, for the most part abandoned illegitimates, who were housed (or kenneled) and fed at the mill, and no questions asked. A modern worker would insist that the amount of work that could be done under such conditions would not be worth the hours, but the foremen were free to lay belts and iron bars upon the backs of the children—Carlyle saw and described this sort of white slavery—and in some places to pinch them with small vices or throw them into tanks of cold water to “refresh” them. No inquiry was ever made into their death-rate, but a Parliamentary inquiry into factory conditions in 1825, which you may still see in the British Museum, told of a moral corruption of the children which made good people shudder.

There were in addition a century ago 3,000,000 or 4,000,000 married women, besides unmarried girls and women, in the works and factories, with a fourteen-hour day six days a week, and these, as well as children from eight to fifteen, have been excluded from production. Add that the men and youths who were then working, on the average, about ninety hours a week have now an average of not more than forty-five, and it will be seen that we produce ten times as much wealth (as shown above) with the same total volume of labour. The spiritual person who speaks disdainfully of our progress as “merely mechanical,” or who declines to appreciate our advance on that side, is blind to the fact that it is the

machine that has abolished the industrial slavery of 100 years ago, and of all earlier centuries. For the life of the people in the Middle Ages, when nine-tenths of the population were what we call "workers" (as if the rest of us were idlers), was even more onerous; and as soon as the body of artisans began to increase, in the days of Elizabeth, the law laid heavy burdens and restrictions upon them.

Those who are not familiar with these matters may ask why, if we now produce ten times as much wealth—and it is agreed by economists of all schools that the national income or total annual production has increased from £300,000,000 to considerably more than £3,000,000,000 (in normal years) in a century—the worker is not ten times as well paid, or if, as is often said, a disproportionate amount has gone to the wealthy. But the fact that, as I said, more than one-fifth of the national wealth is now public wealth, the cost of the army, navy, air force, and police, the cost of mechanical production, and the diversion of £500,000,000 a year of the revenue to social purposes (education, health, pensions, etc.) blunts the edge of the suspicion. Economists, working up the official statistics, have shown that there has been no disproportion in the distribution of the *new* wealth—whatever we may think of the scheme of distribution—and that the average wage of the worker trebled in the course of the last century.

It will be enough here to say that I showed, from Mulhall's *Dictionary* and contemporary documents, that a century ago the average wage was not 12s. a week, labourers, agricultural and industrial, getting from 8s. to 10s., while only a few thousand of the most skilled workers ever rose to 30s. a week. Bread was as dear as it now is, and was heavily adulterated. The workers and their children rarely tasted meat, milk, butter, eggs, and fruit (if not stolen), and never tea, coffee, tobacco,

sugar, cocoa, confectionery, and scores of things which all but the lowest-paid now have daily. Their entertainments were almost confined to drink, fighting, and sex. "Drunk for 1d. Dead drunk for 2d.," was sometimes seen in the windows of public houses. Fighting was the universal sport; and, said Lloyd Jones, a working man who became a respected Christian Socialist leader, "un-chastity was almost general" (meaning universal).

There was at the same time such growth of a sense of civic responsibility and desire for social progress—let us admit also political pressure as the franchise was enlarged—that the new wealth was to a very great extent used to reduce the appalling hereditary burden of misery, coarseness, and violence. Of the £500,000,000 which is now expended annually in social services a little over one-fifth is devoted to education. Here the advance beyond any previous civilization is colossal; and let me again recall that it is the machine which has enabled us to reach so lavish a scale of expenditure. Even the Greeks did not educate the children of the mass of the people, and, while the Romans of imperial days established universal elementary education and the Spanish Arabs came close to the same ideal, the education consisted of little more than teaching children to read—to read the racing programmes in Rome and, for the most part, to read the Koran or popular poetry in Spain—and write. Except that there does seem—one must speak with some hesitation—to have been a fair extension of education under the Medici for a short time, ninety per cent. of Europe remained illiterate from the fifth century to the eighteenth. Against the fantastic claims of our new apologists for the Middle Ages, we have to put the fact that illiteracy extended to from eighty-five to ninety per cent. of the population until the second half of the eighteenth century, and in Roman and Greek Catholic countries until the second part of the nineteenth. Granting that the wealthy, the

middle class, and the clergy were about ten per cent. of the population, it follows that the workers of Europe remained illiterate to the extent of ninety-five per cent. or more.

But it is not merely a question of elementary education. The expenditure of public money on secondary education and technical schools, the smallness of the fees, and the abundance of scholarships provide the workers with a second rung of the ladder. The third—facilities to get university or higher technical education—is still very modest, but evening classes, University Extension Lectures, wireless, national provision of guides at museums, etc., represent a beginning of the second and more important educational service—the education of the adult. Before long we shall realize how the training of the child is mere kindergarten or preparatory work. Meantime the abundance of cheap and finely illustrated literature and of free libraries affords to those who will an opportunity which is as new in history as a motor-car. A century ago the worker who laboriously got some education found newspapers, candles, and even windows taxed; nor did he feel very fit to attempt serious reading after working for sixteen (never less than fourteen) hours a day, including Saturdays.

To those who lightly complain that our education of the people (which ceases just when the child becomes really educable) has failed one may recommend our statistics of crime. These are the people who often lament the deterioration of manners and morals in our time and sigh for "the days of chivalry." They would realize, if they read any responsible authority on the knights and ladies of the Middle Ages, that the average working-class family of to-day is incapable of the coarseness, dishonesty, and brutality of the average men and women of the knightly class in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries—the people who came over with the Conqueror.

One may compare the relation of undesirable conduct generally and crime to the relation of infra-red waves and the luminous waves of the spectrum. Anti-social conduct becomes visible and statistically determinable in the figures of crime. And, in spite of the multiplication of laws and the continuous improvement of the police, crime has diminished notably in the course of the last 100 years : at least in Great Britain and France. It was in less degree reduced in Italy until Fascism obtained power, when it rapidly doubled once more, and in Germany until Nazism poisoned the country. In America the question is sorely complicated by political and other conditions.

It is necessary here only to consider British statistics. We have none for the early part of the nineteenth century, but the reader who cares to read two little works on crime and vice in London in the first decade of the past century, by the magistrate Colquhoun, will smile when his paper next raises the question : Are we better than our fathers ? The volume of grave crime and flagrant vice was incredible. I must be content, however, to say that the number of convictions for grave crime has shrunk in a century to a seventh or an eighth of what it used to be. It was (Mullhall) 21,280 in the decade 1840-49 and less than 6,000 in the decade 1920-29. If you bear in mind that the population has meantime greatly increased and the detection of crime enormously improved, you feel that it would not be far from the truth to say that crime is not one-tenth as frequent as it was a century ago.

There is, moreover, no ground for suspecting that the change in the classification of offences makes the figures misleading. Convictions in the lower Courts for indictable offences have fallen in exactly the same way (27,000 to 8,000), and the number of convictions for the lighter offences has dropped to about one-third. To put it differently, when the police-force was reorganized about eighty years ago 164 out of every 100,000 were annually

committed to trial for crime. By 1925 (when I analysed the figures) the proportion had fallen, in spite of far more effective police, to thirty per 100,000. In France, I showed, there was an even greater reduction of crime. And let me repeat that crime is the visible end of the spectrum of anti-social conduct and a fair measure of general behaviour in different periods.

“I believe the past to have been a far, far better thing than the present,” says Mr. Michael Innes in his latest admirable novel: because apparently 100 years ago there were still placid and elegant manor-homes, with a leisurely life upon which noise and vulgarity never intruded. How four-fifths of the nation lived he has never inquired. Not for a moment do I suggest that Mr. Innes and other literary men are indifferent about the life of the majority as long as a few lived graceful lives, but what is the value of their jibes at our age? Indeed, they do not know well even the leisured class of a century or two centuries ago; and the farther back you go the worse they were. Thackeray *did* know them, and he wrote in his study of social life in the eighteenth century:—

You could no more suffer in a British drawing-room under the reign of Queen Victoria a fine gentleman or a fine lady of Queen Anne's time or hear what they heard and said than you would receive an ancient Briton.

Dr. Inge, being once challenged to say *which* age was better than this of ours which he decries so much, voted for the days of Queen Anne!

Our fine system of education—fine as a preparatory training, which we scandalously refuse to follow up—which machine-production has made possible, is one of the causes of our unprecedented social advance in the nation at large. The second is housing or re-housing. I have not space here to describe the squalid and demoraliz-

ing conditions in which the majority lived a century ago. Indeed, it is not necessary, since they still existed to a large extent in this century and are by no means wholly eliminated. But we have done more in twenty years than any other civilization ever did in 100, and £530,000,000 out of our machine-fed revenue were devoted to subsidizing the work. It did not begin until 1890, and not on any large scale until 1919. Since the latter date, in spite of war-exhaustion and years of depression, the leading countries of Europe have made a mighty attack upon the problem of re-housing.

Great Britain has built 3,500,000 houses, and in 1937 we opened the two-thousandth model block of flats for workers. Germany did splendid work between 1919 and 1932, mostly in 1924-28: the "ghastly period" of Liberal-Socialist power and foreign oppression—in that period Great Britain, France, and America lent Germany (and have lost) £400,000,000 for reconstruction—from which Hitler "saved" the country. From 1900 to 1936 infantile mortality was reduced in England and Wales from 154 to fifty-nine per 1,000; in Germany from 226 to sixty-six; in France from 161 to sixty-seven; in Holland from 155 to thirty-nine. The good old times! And this is only a substantial beginning. A hundred years ago a basement without drains or windows was good enough for a worker. Forty years ago we had got to the point of building for him a brick box with a slate roof. We now begin to build garden cities for him. One should see the photographs in Miss Elizabeth Denby's *Europe Rehoused* (1938), especially of the buildings constructed in Vienna (to which she gives the palm) before Dollfuss betrayed the pass to the Nazis and Fascists, and in Sweden (the second on the roll of honour) and other countries.

A third comprehensive improvement is in the field of hygiene and sanitation. Roman and Roman-Greek cities had sewers in the main streets—in fact, I have seen excel-

lent drain-pipes in the ruins of Cretan palaces which were destroyed more than 3,000 years ago—and the Arab cities of Spain were well drained and lit and amply supplied with water. But the cities of the rest of Europe remained in the foulest and most primitive condition until two to three centuries ago, and the new sanitation remained ludicrously inadequate until the second half of the nineteenth century. The change here—a change which is faithfully reflected in vital statistics and a refining of manners and taste—is so great that a comparison with earlier civilizations is impossible. Anti-scientific writers sometimes object that it means that we have learned to be clean—why we waited fifteen centuries to learn this they do not say—and that we attribute to medical science the results of a new cleanliness. But what happened in the second half of the nineteenth century was that science discovered the deadly nature of dirt as a breeding ground for bacteria, and the new wealth which the machine gave us enabled us to launch an army of surveyors and inspectors upon our world, from the hospital and the workshop to the street, the market, and even the private house.

This service, which has vastly reduced the volume of disease and suffering, we supplement with such medical and hospital service as would have seemed a fantastic dream even to the greatest Arab surgeons and philanthropists and a system of State-aided pensions and insurance which compares with the philanthropic movement under the Epicurean Roman Emperors, the high-water mark of beneficence in previous history, as a mansion compares with a cabin. I do not know whether all these things, in which we surpass previous civilizations from ten-fold to a thousand-fold—these things which have doubled the average expectation of life and enormously reduced the volume of human suffering—are or are not to be counted “merely material” and “mechanical,” but to suggest such a thing would be ludicrous when we go on

to consider the reform of the gross political corruption of little more than a century ago, the growth of religious toleration, the remarkable reduction of drunkenness, the change in the position of woman, the protection of children and animals from cruelty, the spread of the demand for peace (which a century ago was confined to Quakers and small societies), and the application of justice in all life. . . . The list of new things is endless. Are *these* part of the evidence that we have "lost our grip of spiritual realities"?

The answer, I shall be told, is in the progressive darkening of our world during the last ten years, the spread of misery from unemployment, the thunder of war, the cry over half the world that civilization is in danger of collapse. I cannot here enter upon an analysis of the present world-trouble. Time will tell whether it is not the last spasm of evils that are dying: whether we had not relaxed our vigilance in the very pride of our achievements. But let us keep a sense of proportion. The moral evil which has crept upon us infects three or four only out of the forty nations which now constitute civilization. Defensive war, or war voluntarily undertaken against the evil, must not be put in the same category. We pay for the half-heartedness of our application of science to life, the confusion of old and new standards in our guidance of the race. We leave half the field of life open to the haphazard experiments of trial and error instead of bringing the whole under scientific organization. It may be that violence, greed, and dishonesty are in this present conflict once more, possibly for the last time, proving that they are the most costly vices which men can indulge or condone.

The constructive forces which have in the course of history lifted some portion of the race to the higher level are to-day more powerful than ever. The first of them, the production of wealth, is, through the application of

science, ten-fold more effective than it ever was before, and it is used for broader purposes than in any of the Golden Ages of the past. The second great constructive force, humanitarianism, is more widely shared to-day than it ever was before. All history and contemporary experience show that their operation is independent of religious creed or refinements of the sex-ethic. It is, indeed, largely the confusion of dictatorial commands with sound social law in our standards of conduct that has allowed millions to imagine that violence, injustice, and lying can be consecrated by what is said to be an ideal end. The condemnation of them has been written age after age in the blood of the race. It is being written in blood to-day. But the race of to-day is not the race of yesterday, and the lesson will be learned. Possibly before the end of this century there will dawn an age which, in its provision of universal comfort and unbroken peace, in the unfading smiles of its women and children and the robust brotherhood of its men, may with justice give itself the title of the Golden Age.

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